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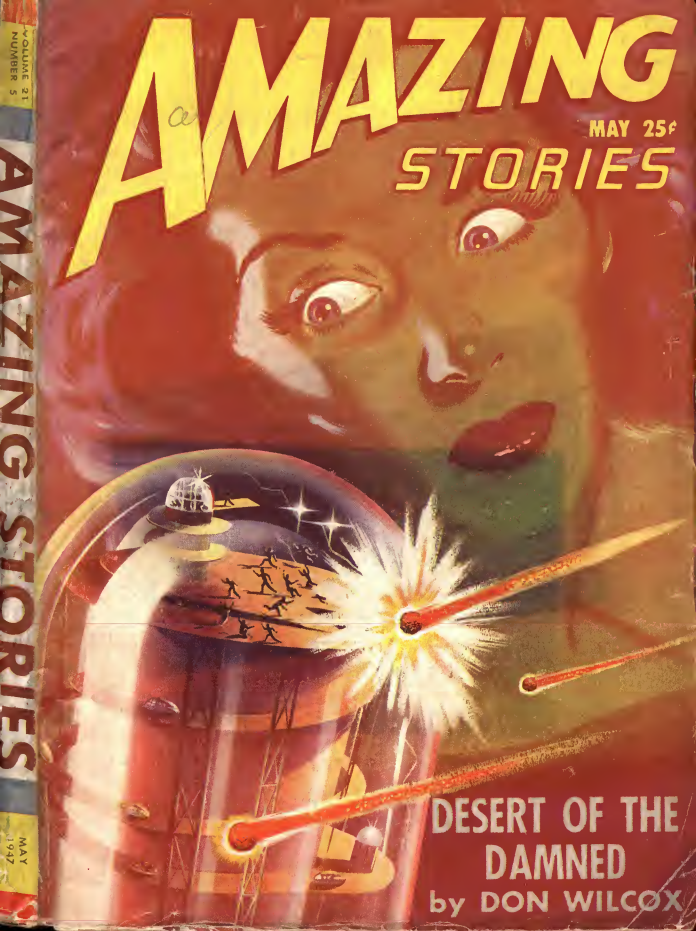
AMAZING STORIES

MAY
1947

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STORIES



DESERT OF THE
DAMNED
by DON WILCOX

She pressed his hand tenderly and
whispered:

"Come back in
an hour...
I shall wait
for you!"

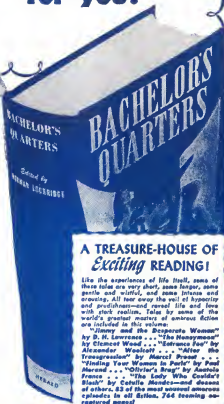


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All Stories Complete

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Remember Jacob's dream, in which he saw angels descending? What about those angels? Was he dreaming, or were they real—and from what race?

THE ANCESTRAL THREAD (Short—6,600).....By Emil Petaja..... 20

Illustrated by H. W. McCauley

There is a thread that ties us to the past, and it is our ancestors who form that thread. Perhaps we can give that thread a tug toward the present?

CONFESSIONS OF A MECHANICAL MAN (Novelet—12,500).....By Buzz-Bolt Atomcracker... 36

Illustrated by Robert Fuqua

What was the secret of my past? Who had I been before I was a robot? Was it because of a mechanical defect that I was "born" a prankster?

DESERT OF THE DAMNED (Novel—54,000).....By Don Wilcox..... 62

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

Out there on the wastes strange things went on—and stranger creatures existed than had ever been seen except in visions of Doré and Dante . . .

Front cover painting by James Teeson illustrating
a scene from "A Letter by Richard S. Shaver."

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The

OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

THIS month we are going to deal with ancient history. We're going to dig way down into our manuscript file and come up with a story that perhaps even the author has forgotten! Yep, this one's been in that file since the early war years! So, you may find portions of it a little "dated"—if an "amazing story" can be dated—with mentions of Nazis, and so on in it. The story is Don Wilcox's "Desert Of The Damned." It is a complete novel, complete in this issue (as all our stories invariably are), running 54,000 words in all. We think you'll find the story on a par with the classics that Don wrote (and published!) in the same distant past! And if you think that's all the ancient history involved, listen to this: The illustration is by Virgil Finlay, your favorite, but it was drawn way back before Virgil joined the army! Well, we know for sure that Time does not dim the excellence of Virgil Finlay, so feast your eyes, and enjoy both of these treats from the past.

ANOTHER story in this issue that comes from deep down in the file is "The Ancestral Thread" by Emil Petaja. Remember we told you once we were saving some really fine stuff

until after the war when our soldier readers were back home and anxious to find out what they'd missed? Well, boys, you ain't missed notbin'! We saved the good ones for you, and here they come! Emil Petaja has become a science fiction great since you went away, and you'll find out why with this one.

ADAM LINK, bless his iron soul, never came back to science fiction, but the other day a mechanical man walked into our office and handed us a manuscript. "There's my story," he said. "Take it or leave it." Then he walked out, buzzing and clicking. Now, if he'll come in again, we'll give him a check for the story—because we took it! We think it's a very nice piece of work, and maybe Mr. Buzz-Bolt will find he'll make a lot of friends with his first story, "Confessions Of A Mechanical Man."

WHAT is an angel? Richard S. Shaver gives us a short story this month which presents an unusual angle on angels! We have angels in religion, in legend, in visions, and it seems there is more than just a little basis for their reality. But no matter what you believe about them, it should be interesting, in a fictional way, to try, as Shaver has done, to conceive of "just what is an angel?" Are they human beings like us, with a higher polish; or is it a matter of evolution? Do angels evolve from human beings? Here's something to think about, via fiction, and at the same time, enjoy yourself while reading an entertaining little yarn. An interesting sidelight on this story is the proof it offers that Shaver has an extremely open mind, in spite of his material insistence that (accept his cave world or not, as you will) we live and die and end there. To him everlasting life is the life of the Titans, out there in dark space; those Titans who left the Earth behind them when they had learned that it was death to remain. This concept is not so strange, even to religious persons, when we consider that each concept really agrees. If we live after death, would it not be a sort of spiritual death if we remained here on earth bound, as it were, to a mouldering corpse we no longer had any use for? Perhaps an angel is just another word for a Titan,



"This is cousin Thomas—he comes from another branch of the family."

(Continued on page 8)

ADVICE TO READERS:

who are suffering the miseries of

BAD SKIN

**Stop Worrying Now About
Pimples and Blackheads**

and other externally caused skin troubles

**JUST FOLLOW SKIN DOCTOR'S
SIMPLE DIRECTIONS**



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It doesn't pay to risk marred skin, blotches, blemishes. Your very success in business, love and social life may depend upon your looks. *Handsomeness and a good appearance usually start with the condition of your skin.* Nobody likes a skin that looks unhealthy, unclean, abused, and marked with blackheads or pimples. **WOMEN ARE ATTRACTED TO MEN WHO HAVE SMOOTH,**

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of the Viderm formulas, complete with full directions, and packed in a safety-sealed carton. On delivery, pay two dollars plus postage. If you wish, you can save the postage fee by mailing the two dollars with your letter. Then, if you aren't thrilled with results, your money will be cheerfully refunded. Remember that both of the formulas you use have been fully tested and proven, and are reliable for you. If they don't help you, your treatments cost you nothing. After you have received your Viderm, if you have any questions to ask concerning abused skin, just send them in.

The OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

(Continued from page 6)

a person smart enough to leave the deadly earth, where death is inevitable to all things.

IN THIS issue, no doubt, you've noted many little "squibs" about the June issue which we plan as a "Shaver summation" issue. Well, we seem to have undertaken a deadline that will drive us about nuts if we are to meet it. Just how much work was involved in presenting a complete picture of the Shaver Mystery in one issue we hardly realized until we pitched into it. So, when you read that issue, and find we've slipped up on some detail, you'll know it's simply because we tackled an enormous job and gave ourselves too little time to do it. But we'll do our best.

AMONG the things to be presented, is a "history" of the Mystery. That is, we'll tell you what happened from the day we first heard from Mr. Shaver right up to today. Then, we'll have such features as "The Shaver Alphabet and How to Use It" (which will be written by your editor in its entirety) and Shaver's own article on the Mystery, giving his stand in the matter, his evidence, his experiences, his convictions, his deductions, and his word that everything in the article is the truth and nothing but the truth, as he sees it. There'll be five or six stories in this issue, too, each of them selected to present a care-

fully planned presentation of the multi-faceted Mystery. Yes, *all* of the stories will be by Mr. Shaver! Unheard of in magazine publishing history? Perhaps, but we are in the habit of doing the unheard-of.

IN PRESENTING these stories, we give, interlarded with the fiction that Mr. Shaver *must* present with his fact in order to make it palatable, entertaining, and in line with all the traditions of good "amazing stories," all of the vast concept of the Titans and their relationship to the Earth's past history, and their present relationship to it, plus their role in the solar system, and in the vastness of the whole cosmos. This concept is representative of the vast history of the "thought records" that exist in the libraries of the caves, and which Mr. Shaver has been privileged to read personally. It does not matter that you believe or do not believe the sum and substance of Shaver's claims to have been in the caves; to have been the recipient of mysterious messages via telaug ray; in the form of voices, thoughts, dreams, visions, and what he calls telesolidograph projections which materialize before him with all the substance of reality. What has been learned by him via these incredible means, he has placed into stories which tell what he has learned in vastly exciting and entertaining manner. Perhaps some of his deductions are wrong, because they are his own, and not yours. You too, many of you readers, have read the stories, and become vastly excited over the deductions you made from them. Perhaps that is more proof than what Mr. Shaver has put into his stories is not just imagination. We have always maintained that it is up to you to find what you will in the stories. There are many of us, and that includes your editor, who say with finality, Mr. Shaver's stories are basically true, no matter what their conceptuality.

OTHER things in the issue will be an article about the letters we have received, summing up many of the deductions we, the editors, have made concerning them. Wouldn't you like to know of a new "fifth column" in our nation today? A very real, scientific fifth column which is out to wreck the peace we have fought for even before we have won it? Maybe we, the editors, are talking through our hats, but there the letters are, and if you can read them and not wonder about the same things we wonder about, all we can say is you waste your time reading. In addition, "Discussions" will contain a few letters that will certainly prove to be interesting.

WELL, the Army has announced some things concerning temperatures in the upper air that are proving very amazing. For instance, -67° about twenty miles up, and 212° above zero about 100 miles up. We don't know the exact figures, but the fact remains that we now no longer can take science's vaunted word that tem-



"I brought a friend, as you asked."

peratures out in space are near absolute zero, nor even that their statement (a few years back) that above the stratosphere the temperature in the atmosphere was a constant (approx. -67°) and that there were no winds.

That statement, like all statements which are based on a complete lack of actual experience and experiment (the scientific method, remember?) has now been proven to be false. They laughed at "stupid" radiomen who claimed there were areas of great heat as high as 600 miles up, hot enough to melt brass, because they found that their radio signals were being hurled back at them. Radiomen had found out by *actual experience*, not imagination, that radio signals were reflected by areas of heat. Warm air, intervening, could stop a radio signal. So, they used the *facts* they had, to deduce conditions in the upper air. Their opponents had "created" a cold space, with a fixed temperature (than which there can be no lower—another pipe-dream!) which just ruled out the radiomen's claim. Well, boys, what do you say now? Hot out there, ain't it? As for AMAZING STORIES we refer you to an issue back in 1939 in which we also predicted that all was not so cold, the higher you went!

THEY are going to find out, too, that gravity will do strange tricks out there in the limits of our atmosphere. They are going to find that just because somebody made a law about inverse squares, that gravity signed up with the law-makers. Watch them try to hit the moon—and miss it, because it doesn't take near the energy to get there as the wise boys calculate. We'd rather trust the mechanics, than the scientists, when the scientists desert the *scientific method*, (which frankly is our little tin god). Let's define *scientific theory* right now for what it is, just theory! Let's stick to actual experience like the Army just had, and laboratory proof, when we start talking about going to the moon. Let's leave the imagination to AMAZING STORIES, which *bases* its predictions on *known fact*, and then goes on from there. Nobody is fool enough to trust his life to imaginative science, but it will be tragic if men who now aim at the planets and the stars trust their lives to "theory," no matter how "recognized" the author of it. Let's have many more actual experiments and experiences with rockets and space before we say we've "conquered" its mysteries with "science." Science is a *gadget, not a theorem!*

NOW that we've established our own right to *theory*, and science's right to *method*, let's do a little theorizing. It'll be up to science to disprove it! (Or [slyly] prove it.) Take the barometer, for instance. It goes up and down and indicates (it says on the graduated scale) atmospheric pressure. Just for theory's sake, let's say "bunk!" The specific gravity of the atmosphere is, *elementally*, the same at all times. Gravity, to use

the term loosely, is a constant, obeying certain observed conditions on the earth's surface. The atmosphere's "gravity" obeys those conditions. It "presses" down with the attraction of mass. Mass is an absolute, relative only in relation to other masses. Thus, it is not the gravitic pressure of the atmosphere that makes the barometer go up and down. Then what is it? Gravity is overcome by axial rotation. Thus the higher atmosphere would seem to us to "press" down with less force because its axial rotation is swifter. But its *elemental* or specific gravity remains the same. *Aha*, now we can theorize. The reason there is a fluctuating barometric reading at the earth's surface is because there is present in the atmosphere at that point something not present at higher altitudes, such as fifty miles out—and that something is water! Then the barometer registers the gravitic thrust of more or less water vapor in the air! Then it is *gravity* that works the barometer, and not "pressure" of the atmosphere (which pressure is a constant—because it is a gas having a *specific density*). And what does this all mean? Maybe Shaver is right about gravity, and it has nothing to do with attraction of mass, but is due *only* to the resistance offered to the passage of what he calls "exd" or "disintegrated matter" or "matter in solution (in the ether)" or what science calls "the ether" and then proceeds to call "nothing at all." The barometer shows only the presence of a denser matter, and records the impediment-rate of resistance to the flow of exd, or ether, through matter.

We suggest the Army send barometers up too! —Rap.



"Hell, yes!"



Doctor Moorehead was engaged in a weird experiment—which some said involved a corpse. But what if the corpse turns into an angel?

The Crystalline Sarcophagus

by Richard S. Shaver

OLD Man Sickler was a town character. He had a face that was a study in red and brown, and a mop of gray hair that stood up on his head at the mention of an argument.

He lived in a little shack near the edge of town. He didn't pay much attention to being clean, or keeping his hair cut, or keeping his mouth shut. But I learned he *could* keep his mouth shut when the need arose.

Lately Old Man Sickler had a bee in his bonnet about Doctor Moorehead. The Doc had a big gingerbread mansion next door to Old Sickler's shabby four room shack up on the hill at the end of Main Street. A sign on the learned Doctor Moorehead's front porch proclaimed him to be a research physicist. The house was surrounded by large elms and sycamores, and the Doctor was always busy inside at something or other. He didn't walk out much, and when he did he walked fast. All attempts to draw him into conversation failed; the Doc just gave the inquisitors a brisk "Good Morning" and kept on walking. So nobody in town but Old Man Sickler was very well acquainted with Doctor Moorehead, though I doubt anyone had ever pointed that fact out.

The Doctor, like others in town, seemed to take a delight in giving Old Man Sickler something to puzzle about; to "get him going". He would tell Sickler some impossible rigamarole full of scientific terms, and the bunch in the drugstore would howl when Old Man Sickler tried to repeat the Doctor's words. This habit of the Doctor's was the thing that made us almost miss the biggest thing that ever happened in our

town of Bersburg. When Old Man Sickler tried to tell us of the disappearance of the old lady, of the reappearance of a young girl in her place, and finally of the "glass coffin," we all thought the Doctor was having more fun at the old man's expense. But this night it was different.

This night Belle and I were standing in the drug store, debating on a movie or a swim to finish off the day, when old man Sickler came in, his mop of gray hair on end. He didn't wear a hat. The night outside was heavy with the smell of the young summer's leaves; and Old Sickler, with the garden soil on his heavy shoes, brought some of the scent of growth in with him. Everyone turned and waited expectantly to hear what he had to say. But he wasn't having any tonight.

"I want some of them Je Jay Corn Plasters, John," said Sickler to the druggist. The druggist winked at me, his pimply face impish, and I cocked an ear.

"Okay, Mr. Sickler. Right away." John fumbled around under the counter, though the plasters were in plain sight. I knew he was figuring on getting the old fellow wound up, for the little town didn't furnish much excitement and this was a chance to get a little relief from the monotony. Still fumbling, the druggist started on a topic that was calculated to arouse the old man.

"How's the Doctor and his corpse coming? Any new developments?"

THE old man rose to the bait nobly.

"I know you don't believe me,

but I know what I saw with my own eyes. I went over and peeked in the window just afore I came down town. Yessir, that's the funniest thing I ever seen in my life. You know what he's done now?"

"No, what has he done now? I wouldn't put anything past him. Those dark eyes of his, and that slick shiny hair, and the way he walks around too good to talk to people. Tell us about it."

John wouldn't have said that sort of thing for any reason but to lead the old man on. He was only repeating the old man's talk about the Doctor.

"He's got the woman all plastered over with some kind of soft, glassy stuff. Yessir, she's just like a mummy in a crystal coffin. Funniest thing I ever seen. And only last week I would have sworn she was alive and breathing. Now she's wrapped up in glass, as tight as if it was poured around her. I think it *was* poured around her, hot glass, and her alive while he done it. If he ain't a kind of a Dracula or a vampire or something, what became of the old lady that used to be there with him. What become of her?" For some reason the druggist realized that that kind of talk might go too far, and said:

"Why you remember where she came from, Mr. Sickler. She was the only stranger came to this town to stay in quite a while. That woman in the bed is the little old lady, came here to take treatments from the Doctor. Now she's died and the Professor bought her a glass coffin. Don't you think that's it?"

The druggist was evidently not believing the old man, but willing to hear it if there was any more to be heard. I listened, too, for it did sound eerie, with Sickler's wild old eyes rolling and his whisper hissing through the drugstore. Next to me the cabby looked up from his comic sheet. Sickler's whisper went

on, loud enough to be heard in the next block in this quiet town.

"It can't be her, John. She was old, and the woman in the glass don't look a day over twenty. And she ain't got nothing on her, under the glass. And the Doctor stands over the case, worried like, listening with his stethoscope and his electric meters, making a fuss over a dead body. What kind of goings on is that, now? Besides, whatever became of the old lady? I ain't seen her around for six months. Have you?"

The cabby, who had evidently absorbed the conversation from the beginning, spoke up.

"I never took her away, John. And Moorehead doesn't have a car. I never could figure where she got to myself. There's no other cab in town that I know of. She might have walked down to the station herself, but someone would have seen her and mentioned it. You know how it is, she was almost the only stranger in town. Besides, she could hardly walk when I brought her here. Had to help her out of the car and up the Doctor's steps."

Old Man Sickler got in a lick.

"That Moorehead ain't rightly a Doctor, anyways. He never Doctored anybody I knowed of. And that sign on his front porch ain't a Doctor's sign. 'Physikist!' That ain't 'Doctor,' to me.

The druggist looked at me.

"Well, I'll be darned."

It *was* getting a little steep for joking. Sickler started out the door, shaking his head.

"Darn funny doings, if you ask me. He might have killed that old lady, for all we know. He looks like some dinged fancy murder feller to me, anyways. I heard him laughing to himself when there wasn't a soul around to laugh at. This gal he's got wrapped up in glass might be the old lady's daughter, come to see what become of her mother. How

do we know? You don't keer a darn, but I live next door. Why, the Prof. might decide I knew too much, or catch me peeping in the window at his glass coffin, and bump me off, too."

SICKLER went out into the soft, leaf-scented night, his garden boots clumping loud in the stillness. I looked at Belle.

"Just *what* do you make of *that*?"

"Frank Mellon, I think it's a crazy old man talking about things he imagines. That's all it is, and you know it.

"The cabman isn't crazy, Belle."

Right about now I better introduce myself and Belle. Belle is a good looking redhead of twenty-two or so who does all the typing for the office of the Bersburg *Clarion*. I'm the inquiring young man about town who writes all the stories that give the town something to gossip about. The town doesn't like me very well. I once said the place was full of snooty old busybodies, and they all took it as a personal affront when it got around. I must have been right! But my old man owns a large block of the stock of the paper and they can't get me fired. We usually met in the drugstore, Belle and I, because Old Bill Mercer, Belle's dad, doesn't like me any better than the rest of the town.

I was interested, more than I cared to say, in what I had heard of Moorehead tonight.

"Look, Belle, suppose you and I take a walk up to Old Man Sickler's place and get him to show us the window he used to see all this through? There just *might* be something worth seeing."

"And suppose we don't. Doctor Moorehead could get right angry at such snooping if he caught up. And the *Clarion* would have to fire me, if they can't fire you. And a girl has to eat."

"Swell. Then we'd have to get mar-

ried right now, instead of putting it off 'til we're old and grey. Come on!"

As we passed the fountain mirror, my tousled black head beside her gleaming red tresses; my rough, heavy features beside her chiseled, smooth sculptured face; were a contrast I never failed to notice with a strange thrill of possession for her beauty.

* * *

OLD Man Sickler pushed his shaggy grey head through the rhododendrons ahead of us. We stooped and followed him through. Up against the side of the house, we raised up and looked in the window, following the old man's pointing finger. The shutters were closed inside, but you could see between the cracks if you put your eyes up close to the window. Belle and I both let out our breath in a double "whoosh."

In the middle of the big room was an old four-poster bed. A soft light glowed over the bed. On it was a *something*. A *something* that our eyes refused to believe.

Around the room was a lot of apparatus, not particularly understandable, but all looking somehow familiar, as if one had seen all the parts in the college lab. Stills bubbled over bunsen burners, several big condensers hung from the bars of the metal stands, and on the three tables was an array of electrical apparatus that did *not* look familiar. Decidedly not.

But the figure on the bed eclipsed all this array of scientific paraphernalia. Like Old Sickler had said, it was a young woman in a glass-like wrapping. It seemed to have been poured about her in a liquid state, for it fitted her apparently nude body exactly. She looked like some weird statue of glass, tinted inside with the colors of life. But

about the thing was an air of life, a terrible significance I could not quite grasp. This terrific meaning struck one as if one had peered for a moment into another world. For that semi-transparent glass wrapping had the markings, the peculiar conformations, of a human chrysalis. And within it breathed the thought of life. The woman was not dead; one felt it. If a human body was not a human body, but something insect-like that had formed a chrysalis—this would be what it looked like.

My mind raced furiously. Why should anyone want to build a glass sarcophagus, a coffin for anyone—and why should they shape it to the body so suggestively as to intimate that the body was but sleeping within a cocoon? It was perhaps a poetic kind of burial we were witnessing. But this line of thought was quickly discarded by me when the Professor entered the room.

Going up to the body, he took a stethoscope from the table and bending over the lovely sculpture on the bed, listened for long minutes to the heart action. How could there be any heart action in a woman enclosed in glass?

BELLE and I looked at each other. Nonplussed was no word for it. We were just plain stumped. What we were looking at had no parallel, nothing comparable by which our minds could evaluate or decide, no course of action suggested itself to us. We stole silently away again, bade Old Sickler a mumbled good night.

Nor did we write it up for the paper. We just kept quiet and waited. After that Belle and I formed a habit of going up to Old Man Sickler's on the sly and taking a look through the shutters at Professor Moorehead's secret mummy. It wasn't a mummy though. It was the liveliest looking corpse I ever saw.

Summer dragged into Fall, the leaves began to burn into vari-colored carpets on the ground, the persimmons ripened in the first frosts. There wasn't much cover left in the leafless bushes for our sneaks into Prof. Moorehead's grounds, but we went anyway. We took a couple of our friends into our confidence, but had no ideas on what a man should do when confronted with the inexplicable. So our trips to Mooreheads sometimes included a friend or two, just to "prove it to you."

Old Man Sickler was in his glory, but he heeded our advice not to talk about it, for it was something we couldn't understand. We couldn't say the Doc. was guilty of anything, for we didn't know enough. You would think we would have found a chance to talk to Moorehead about the thing on the bed, but he didn't give us much chance. When he walked he walked fast, and he didn't stop to chat. A frozen, abrupt "Good Morning" was all we ever got out of him, and he was gone again on his walk.

By this time there were a couple of dozen of us in on his secret. He must have got wind of our spying some way. Perhaps he noticed our tracks in the soft ground of the rhododendron beds. Anyway one Friday night in early October we were stooping through the bushes when a harsh voice cried out to us.

"Who's there? Come out into the light and let's have a look at you."

We came. The Doc. didn't sound like a man to argue with. Besides he might have a gun. There were only Belle and I that night. Old Man Sickler had stayed in his house with the "rheumatiz." I was glad there was no one there to complicate the soft soap I figured on giving the Prof with a lot of foolish accusations. I wanted to know what it was all about. So I

straightened up and talked. It was high time somebody did.

"Professor Moorehead, we have known for some time what a curious object you have there on your bed. We have seen you listening for the heart-beat and—other things. . . . Our curiosity is too much for us. Not knowing how you would receive our intrusion, we did not care to risk losing all chance of seeing just what your work was leading to. Will you take us into your confidence?"

"You mean to say you have known for a long time?" The Professor was taken aback. His sharp, bony face softened. The black deep eyes with the worried frown between looked closely at us, as if trying to recall where he had seen us.

"You are two young people who work for the local paper. Why haven't you put your information in your cheap little sheet?"

"Well, Professor, we didn't want to go off half cocked, and we didn't want to embarrass you in case you were innocent of any wrong intent. We have been waiting for a chance to sound you out without revealing our hand, but somehow it never came."

"Come in. I can see you deserve an explanation of these things that puzzle you. I must say you have shown admirable forbearance in keeping your mouths shut about things you didn't understand. I offer my gratitude. Whatever led you to withhold action on this—let me tell you, you did the right thing."

WE followed him into the long front hall, with the old but expensive carpet running up the winding, beautiful open staircase, with the great grandfather's clock ticking, and the indirect lights from the recently installed modern fixtures making the place pleasant

and far from any gloomy Dracula's hangout. He seated us in the adjacent drawing room, calling it the parlor just as we would have. Then he lit a cigar and began to talk. We listened. Maybe we understood and maybe we didn't. I hope we did, for it means so much to man to have Dr. Moorehead right.

"To explain what you have seen, I will have to give you a little talk on science. Follow closely or you will not understand.

"You see, it is not true that men do not know the cause of age. It is true that *they do not know they know* the cause. But perhaps I had better give this talk where you can see the object in which you have been so interested."

The Professor led us into the room which we had already seen so often through the drawn shutters. On the bed lay the crystalline sarcophagus, a thing of breath-taking beauty, much more so now that we were close.

"This woman was once a great beauty, and quite famous. I can not tell you her name, she would rather not have any publicity. Now that this particular angle has developed, I doubt that publicity would do either she or I any good. Anyway, she consented to be the subject of my experimental proof of the efficacy of my treatment."

"Professor Moorehead," asked Belle looking thoroughly confused, "What did you intimate by saying this woman *was* once a beauty?"

"Her age was over seventy-five when I first began my work. She has been under treatment a little over a year. You can see the results, so far as age goes, in her youthful appearance. But this crystalline pupa is, frankly, something I do not understand. It is entirely outside my experience. So it is that I find myself with a problem too big for me to solve."

"I don't quite understand." Belle

was confused, and myself saw no light evident that would lessen her confusion. I could only guess at what the Professor was driving.

"Just what is this treatment you speak of?"

"It has to do with a new theory of the cause of age. It is my own theory, but the treatment I eventually adopted for use on aged people is not my own. You see, I deduced that age was due to radioactive material accumulating in the body over the whole lifetime—a gradual radium poisoning. Madame Curie herself died of a complication resulting almost directly from radium poisoning. She would not have died had I been there."

Belle was intensely interested and beginning to get a glimmer. I had a few ideas myself, but not the audacity to open my mouth for fear of putting my foot in it.

The Professor looked at Belle with a kindly, thoughtful expression. Belle asked:

"You say it is not your own treatment. Just what do you mean? If it made this woman young, why did she have to be enclosed in glass? Is she dead?"

"You see, my understanding of the cause of age is new. The treatment which I use for rejuvenation was developed by others for the purpose of treating victims of radium poisoning.¹ I adopted the treatment of aged people

when I proved to my own satisfaction that age is caused by radium poisoning. Radium is thrown here every day from the sun. We eat it, we drink it, we breathe it with our air. So we age and so do all living things."

"Your theory sounds probable. I have myself wondered if there were not more effects from the sun than a tan—if science could but discover them."

I WAS very anxious to find out just how all this explained a glass wrapping around a young woman—a young woman who had not been young before, but now had every appearance of youth.

"It is true that the sun is the cause of age in all living things, including plants and trees. I have proved it. One of the ways I proved it was by curing it."

I gasped.

"You cured age! I can't believe it. Are you serious?"

"I studied the treatment for radium poisoning, used it on experimental animals, who were not poisoned by radium, but were aged. They became startlingly younger, and the longer they took the treatment, the younger they became. But certain other very puzzling changes came about. I cannot fully understand them. So it is that I could not give my work to the world. Not until I understand why these things happened."

He paused musing—then said:

"Come with me, I will show you some of these things that puzzle me."

As we walked through the house and out to a building in the back of the grounds, my curiosity made me ask him one more question, instead of waiting for his own explanation.

"Doctor Moorehead, just what is the treatment for radium poisoning?"

He was not at all loath to talk. He said:

¹ If radium is eaten, drunk in radioactive water, or breathed into the lungs with air, it tends to be deposited in the bones, and begins a *slow poisoning process* which will be fatal if enough radium is present. Though radium is extremely expensive, ten cents worth is enough to kill a man if it gets into his bones. Eating five dollars worth, or breathing fifty cents worth of radium salt will accomplish this. As little as one ten-millionth of an ounce of radium deposited in the bones has been found to cause death within ten years.—"Atoms in Action" by George Russell Harrison.

"Radium is chemically like calcium.² Bones are made from calcium, and the unsuspecting bloodstream willingly deposits radium atoms wherever calcium atoms are needed for building purposes. The only cure for a person suffering from radium poisoning is to get them out—find a method of removing these radium atoms."

"That sounds like a pretty impossible job."

"At first glance it does seem impossible. But in practice it is not at all. It has been found quite *possible* literally to *rinse* the dangerous atoms out of the patient's bones! First the patient is given a medical treatment—a diet—which causes his bones to lose calcium. This diet is really only food high in vinegar content—and other acids like vinegar which have a natural affinity for calcium. I give such a diet for a week, then I give normal food for a week, except that I put in the food chemically pure calcium which I test myself to make sure there is absolutely no radioactivity present. It sometimes occurs in almost any material that radioactivity is present. The vinegar and acid diet has a relatively low power to harm the body, and the calcium goes out with it. Some of the radium goes out with the calcium, still masquerading as calcium, due to its valence. I continue this treatment, in the case of my human patients, for eighteen months,

² Radium is chemically like calcium from which bones are made and the unsuspecting blood stream willingly deposits radium atoms wherever calcium atoms are needed for rebuilding purposes . . . In a number of cases of radium poisoning, it has been found possible to literally rinse some of the dangerous atoms out of the patient's bones. First he is given a medical treatment which causes his bones to lose calcium, and as the calcium departs, some of the radium is forced out with it, in keeping with its masquerade as calcium. Before his bones are appreciably softened the treatment is reversed and the body is encouraged to take up fresh calcium to rebuild them.—Harri-son's "Atoms in Action."

alternating each week from acid to calcium. Simple is it not?"

"You mean to tell me that is all there is to it?"

"Except for extreme care, yes, that is all. But complications have developed. Look at these animals. They are animals once feeble with age. Now they are young and active, extremely healthy. But some of them go into incubational pupa stages which are not natural to the animal as we know it. It is beyond human experience. That is what happened to my first human patient. See—here is an animal which I treated over a period of years with the alternate removal and replacement of calcium diets. Everything was fine until one day he went to sleep. A chrysalis formed about his body, and when it opened—that came out. Do you recognize the animal?"

He was indicating a cage containing an animal with four long legs, clawed like a cormorant, a pair of delicate membranous wings of giant size, and two huge eyes that gazed at us mournfully.

"I can't say I ever saw anything like it. What is it?"

"It is a guinea pig. That is, it was before this happened. In the case of my human patient, I explained these strange developments, and she begged to go on with the work. Now the chrysalis has formed about her, and God alone knows what time will bring forth from the human chrysalis."

THERE were dozens of other animals about the building, in cages. But hardly any of them were recognizable. Did you ever see a cat or dog built like the Sphinx? Well, I did. And after seeing him, I wondered if maybe the ancients didn't have a little more to say when they built such ornaments as the Sphinx—a little more of

a message for the future man than we have ever understood. Certainly those animals such as Doctor Moorehead showed us told me that such things as the Sphinx could be.

My mind in a whirl at the terrific consequences that might come from world-wide knowledge of Moorehead's methods, I followed him back into the house. Belle's soft arm was clutched tightly about my own, her usual self-confidence dashed by these revelations to a silent wonder.

As we walked back through the house the Doctor stepped once more into the room where the young woman lay wrapped in her blanket of crystalline sleep. We stood behind him, silently gazing on the mystery that life had suddenly become. And as we looked at her, a tremor shook the crystalline casing of her lovely form. A crack appeared down the clear sheen of the crystal from the forehead to the breast.

The Professor bent over her, reverently, fearfully. She was as beautiful as a dead goddess. A long, slow writhing shook the lovely body. She seemed, within the cloudy transparency of the sheathing, to be waking, struggling against her sleep. Her body began to pulse slowly with a pink suffusion of new life.

As we watched, the first faint stirring spread, her arms thrust outward. The crack widened, and abruptly the upper half of her case split wide open. From it her head and shoulders shrugged outward, and the unconscious writhing, the sleepy twisting, spread through all her figure and increased in a vibratory way.

Her eyes opened, looked at us as the eyes of a child do when they say that Heaven can be seen through the eyes of a child. Her eyes were like that, innocently questing, and bringing forth in me every noble impulse to do the

right thing.

We dared not move. We were watching something no man would have the temerity to interfere against. Her whole body shrugged itself free of the plastic enclosing her, and she stepped forth alone as the Doctor sprang to assist her. As he did so, standing by the couch and turning, she shook herself, and behind her—*behind her!*—great pinions unfolded and her broad wings swung quivering behind her, moist but swiftly drying to a beauty of hue never seen on bird before. In a short time she stepped toward us holding out her hands. Her voice was husky.

"Doctor Moorehead, I am glad everything has turned out so well."

Moorehead was not exactly astounded, his expression was more that of a man whose choicest hopes have suddenly been proved sound and feasible.

"Madame De Ronde, I am glad to welcome you to earth as the first angel to be seen by modern man!"

* * *

AND that was just what we had witnessed, the rebirth of the angel. Once in the past when men had understood immortality, the highest cycle of the life of the animal man had been the winged man. Now, when men are mortal, none of them live long enough to fulfill the destined cycle of growth. But, given again the power of youth in age, the old inherited command to gestate into the higher state had come into being, and the body of Doctor Moorehead's patient had responded. Angels were immortal women. She was the most glorious creature I have ever seen—and I know now what the legendary angel was—the winged man that develops from the grub that men and women are today—and will be till they learn to live long enough to become the angel that is the full growth of man—as the past tells us. We watched the

birth of an angel—a woman who had lived long enough to fulfill the great inheritance the blood of men still carries

from the past—the angel that was our forebear.³

THE END

Vignettes

OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Luigi Galvani

He is the scientist who discovered that an electric current could cause dead animals to move as though alive

LUIGI GALVANI, the Italian physiologist, after whom galvanism received its name, was born at Bologna, Italy on September 9, 1737. His parents wanted him to study for the Church, but preferring medicine he made himself so proficient in that art, that he was offered and accepted the chair of anatomy at the university of his native city, and while there published a number of valuable monographs on anatomical and surgical subjects. He gained repute as a comparative anatomist from his researches on the organs of hearing and genitourinary tract of birds.

In 1786, while studying the muscular system in the legs of frogs, he had suspended several freshly prepared specimens by wires alongside of the iron framework of a balcony and his attention was attracted to the fact that when moved by the wind one of them touched the iron, the muscles contracted strongly, as if still alive, the action being repeated at each contact, until decomposition of the flesh had begun. He correctly ascribed the effect to a force traversing the nerves, but assumed its origin to be in the leg of the animal, and an indication of the existence of a vital force, and hence of the continuance of life for a considerable period after apparent death and dismemberment. This led to his invention of the metallic arc. He constructed the arc of two different metals, which, placed

in contact the one with a frog's nerve and the other with a muscle, caused contraction of the latter. In Galvani's view the motions of the muscle were the result of the union, by means of the metallic arc, of its exterior or negative electrical charge with positive electricity which proceeded along the nerve from its inner substance. Volta, on the other hand, attributed them solely to the effect of electricity having its source in the junction of the two dissimilar metals of the arc, and regarded the nerve and muscle simply as conductors.

ASIDE from this more or less accidental discovery, Galvani made no other notable contribution to the advancement of science. But in the fields of anatomy and medicine his standing was so high, that in 1879 a long-overdue statue was unveiled to his memory in his native city. Galvani died at Bologna, on December 4, 1798.

The rather startling nature of his discovery, and the persistence through many years (as a result of his great medical reputation) of his theory of a "vital force," has won for his name a very extended notoriety. Thus, even today, we speak of the galvanic current when we should call it the voltaic current, and similarly we use the term galvanization in referring to the effects of the voltaic current as displayed in the various processes of metal plating. But Volta has been properly honored in another way. However, when we speak of an individual as having been galvanized into a temporary or fictitious display of activity, we correctly recall to mind the picture of Galvani's frogs' legs hanging on his balcony, and exhibiting unsuspected and adventitious indications of life.

Galvani enunciated his theory of animal electricity in a treatise published in 1791.

³The author is of the firm belief that the method outlined in the story for rejuvenation (the same method here outlined for radium poisoning) would result in rejuvenation—for the author believes that radium and kindred radioactives from the sun are the cause of all age in all living things. Of course the treatment would have to continue over a long period of time.—Author.

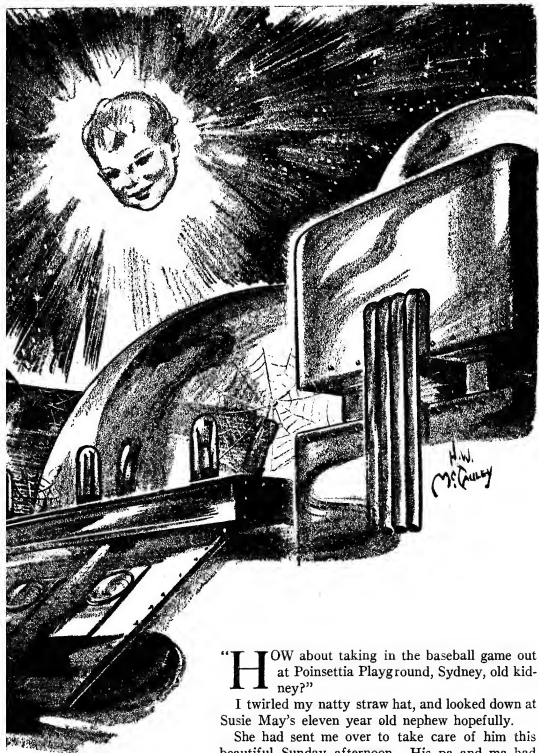
The Ancestral Thread

There is a thread that ties us to our ancestors—and when we begin to monkey with it, we may find ourselves all snarled up. . .

by Emil
Petaja



It was the face of a baby boy, floating before him . . .



HOW about taking in the baseball game out at Poinsettia Playground, Sydney, old kidney?"

I twirled my natty straw hat, and looked down at Susie May's eleven year old nephew hopefully.

She had sent me over to take care of him this beautiful Sunday afternoon. His pa and ma had left town and were afraid to leave him alone. He had been acting peculiar lately. They were worried.

He ignored me.

He only stared out of the window of their big, ancient, atrocious Alvarado Street house, his mind a million miles away.

"Maybe the movies?" I tried again, with a playful jab in the ribs. "There's a killer-diller at the Westlake."

No answer.

Sydney sat on the window seat in the front hall. His little hand was propped under his chin; his sandy hair drooped carelessly almost over his heavy horn-rimmed spectacles; his boyish lips were a grim thoughtful line.

Rodin's "Thinker" popped into my mind. A young Thinker, that hadn't grown up yet.

"Hmmm," I said, reading the title of the book Syd had been reading and which was lying open nearby. "Prof. Albert Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*. Hmmm . . . You do pick 'em deep, don't you, Syd, old kid!"

At this he turned his head. He eyed me frowningly. His eyes were blue, cold blue. I felt abashed under their penetrating scrutiny. And Sydney's thick specs made them look twice as big, and sort of uncanny. Especially on an eleven year old boy.

"Who are you?" Susie May's nephew asked. "And what do you want?"

WELL! Right then you could have knocked me down with a fender. I'd given up my only free day in the week to entertain this brat of a nephew, and had stood there ten minutes twirling my straw hat and making suggestion after suggestion for a gay and carefree afternoon.

"Come out of the clouds, kiddo. You know me!" I tried to sound gruff.

"Oh, Uncle Lemuel Mason. To be sure." He gave off a slow grave smile. "You must forgive my seeming discourtesy in permitting my mental preoccupation to prelude prepension while you were—"

"It's all right," I grinned, ruffling his sandy hair. "Think nothing of it."

I rubbed my chin thoughtfully. So this was part of his odd behavior—talking like a pint-size Thesaurus.

"Well, Syd," I added, in a moment. "What's the verdict? Baseball, movies, or—?"

He shook his head.

"They have no appeal for me," he smiled. "I'd be much better occupied in perusing Einstein further, or—"

"Or what?" I asked in astonishment, as he hesitated.

"Or working in my laboratory. Mentally I've been mulling over a furtherance of my own *Theory of Mental Progression*, which even in its present embryonic stages may well change the whole course of my highly significant experimentations."

And he never cracked a smile when he said it!

I sat down. I had to, I was that dumbfounded.

"Er . . . Tell me about it," I gasped uneasily, when I caught my breath.

"Afraid you wouldn't understand, Uncle Lem." Syd shook his head and again emitted that grave professorial smile. "It is far too involved. Even I—"

Even he . . .

I HAD to laugh then. It was too much.

Sydney and I weren't what you'd call bosom pals, but in the few times I'd talked with him before he had struck me as a perfectly normal though bright young fellow. A little given to imaginative reading maybe. But nothing like this!

"Come on outside in the fresh air, Syd. You've had your little joke." I took his hand, and tugged him off his perch. "We'll take a nice walk around the park, and decide what we want to

do."

"You—you don't believe me—either?" His boyish treble accused, as he pulled his hand out of mine. His big eyes held an unhappy vexed look.

I had better humor him, I determined. These little mental quirks can develop into pure unadulterated buggyness if not handled delicately.

"Sure I do." I essayed a smile, and again urged him toward the sunlight that blinked through the green leaves outside the open door.

"Wait a minute!"

Sydney's face reddened with anger and excitement.

"I'm getting sick and tired of all this small-minded treatment!" he went on, his boy's voice quivering. "Heretofore I've kept my experiments to myself, but now it's high time I told somebody. Uncle Lem Mason," he ended on a note of high command. "You follow me upstairs—to my laboratory in the attic!"

What else could I do?

He leaped up the stairs like a gazelle, and I trotted after, more like a pack mule.

Sydney shut the attic door behind us, and switched on some lights.

I rubbered around me.

The attic was one whopping big room. Over in one corner was a long porcelain topped work bench that appeared to have known long usage. It was littered with motley junk, both tools for working with metals, as well as scientific chemistry apparatus.

Opposite this versatile work bench was a gargantuan machine. That's all I could call it. It might have been a threshing machine or a Rube Goldberg salad mixer, for all the sense it made to me. But it was, I could see, equipped with dials, levers, and gauges, and in front of it was a curious metal chair that faced two metal handles.

Most of the attic was dusty and cob-

webbed, as though it hadn't been used for many years, but the machine and the work bench were spic and span. The metal gleamed, and the glass showed evidence of recent polishing.

"Don't tell me *you* built all this!" I exclaimed incredulously, as Syd busied himself about the place in a proprietary manner.

"Certainly not," he denied.

"Who did?"

"**P**ROFESSOR Maxamillian Leyton."

Syd began. "He owned and lived in this old house for over twenty years. Until he disappeared very mysteriously some fifteen years back.

"His heirs, who lived in the East and had had little or nothing to do with the old scientist in many decades, got the property off their hands as soon as they legally could. They sold it to my father, sight unseen.

"Old Leyton had conducted a lot of unprecedented experiments in his laboratory at one of the big California colleges, and was considered a little wacky. This led to his dismissal. He became very misanthropic, and worked up here in this attic all alone, allowing no one up here, not even his housekeeper.

"Apparently Leyton hadn't a friend or confidante in the whole world. Occasionally he was in the habit of making trips to various parts of the country, and when he vanished nobody cared much, thinking he had disappeared by preference. The attic was boarded up, and his efforts here dismissed as so much junk . . ."

"No!" I grinned.

Syd's young-old eyes gave me an icy massage.

"The machine was so bulky that my father didn't bother to have it moved, so it was left here. We didn't use the attic anyway.

"But one rainy afternoon last April I was wandering around the old dark halls up here, playing Daniel Boone stalking a bear." Syd smiled crookedly. "You see, I was only a child then, with a child's mental limitations—"

"What do you think you—"

"Quiet!" Syd snapped, like a grandpop at a seven-year-old. "In my play, I kicked loose one of the boards over the attic door, managed to work the lock open, and squeezed my way in."

"I discovered the machine, all covered with dust. And this machine has changed everything for me. Everything."

"How?" I ventured.

He was so in earnest I didn't feel like laughing any more.

Syd's exaggerated optics burned into mine, like cold blue flames, radiant with knowledge.

"The machine has shown me all there is to know about myself," the wonder boy said. "From the furthest roots of my pre-human ancestry, to the high-point in the life of my great grand-son!"

ALL I could do was give out a shrill whistle, and sit myself down on an old apple box.

Sydney paid me little heed. He walked briskly over to the huge machine, and started the thing to humming by twisting various dials, and throwing a switch.

For a few minutes he was absorbed in his amazing child's play, then he perched himself on the work bench and went on with his story:

"I have always been possessed of an overwhelming curiosity, even as a boy of eleven," the boy of eleven said serenely. "So I poked about this machine after wiping the dust off, and twisted dials, and pulled levers, wondering what on earth its purpose might be. Nothing happened.

"Then it occurred to me to hunt for an explanation in the drawers of the work bench. I wiped away more dust, and kept searching around, day after day.

"You see, I was getting over the mumps, and wasn't allowed to go to school. I had all day to spend up here in the attic, and try to solve this perplexing mystery.

Finally, one day, I discovered a notebook, filled with almost illegible writing. I couldn't make much out of the writing, since Professor Leyton was anything but methodical. He seems to have worked pell-mell. Everything indicates that. I doubt that anybody could successfully build another machine like this one from his insufficient notes.

"But there was a diagram of the machine in the notebook, and some instructions for its operation noted thereon. Or course it took my child-mind days to make any headway in my attempts to read it and comprehend these instructions. But somehow I did.

"Mostly it was by accident.

"I hadn't the foggiest notion of what would happen to me when I tried the machine, but I was all for plunging ahead. So one bright Spring day I sat down on that metal chair, after taking a capsule from the box I found with the notebook as directed in the diagram, and turned dials, then threw the switch, and waited excitedly for what might occur . . ."

"So what did happen?"

Sydney smiled.

"First nothing. So I tried again. And again. Then little by little I discovered what I'd been doing wrong, and revised my attempts accordingly.

"For instance, I discovered that my hands were to keep holding on the two bright metal handles directly in front of the chair until the machine had made

contact with my mind. A series of wave-like shocks passed up my little arms and into my body.

"I was frightened. I tried to let go of the handles, but they stuck as if glued.

"I felt I couldn't bear it much longer. A terrifying vertigo seemed to be sweeping me on and out of my body. I swooped through time and space, as though on a cosmic roller-coaster."

"What *happened*? I panted, rocking on my apple box.

"I passed out . . ."

"WHEN I came out of it," Syd continued in his boyish treble, "the vertigo had passed. My hands still gripped the handles, but my mind was clear, very clear. And it was filled with phantasmagoric bits of new knowledge, as if it had been dipped in some cosmic mind-pool.

"For instance, I knew which dial I should turn now, and that the lever on my extreme right would automatically shut the whole machine off, should that be necessary.

"But I didn't want the machine off. I wanted to test its full powers.

"I found that now I could lift one hand off the handle and still maintain contact. So I twisted one of the two large dials directly above the handles. The one clumsily marked 'Back'. I turned it two notches only.

"Immediately I wasn't in the attic any longer . . .

"I was in an old-fashioned office, sitting behind a big desk, with a cigar in my mouth, and my feet propped up on a waste basket. I was grown up, and dressed in a funny tight-trousered suit of loud checks. I wore a black mustache that curled up at the ends. I stroked it from time to time, very proudly.

"I was talking, dictating a letter to

a pretty girl whose chestnut hair was wrapped into a weird bun at the back of her neck. She was dressed in a prim white shirt-waist and ankle-length skirt that fell over high button shoes.

"You must understand, that while suddenly I *was* this old-time gentleman, seeing what he saw through his eyes, hearing what he heard, and feeling what he felt; at the same time I was powerless to direct his movements. I played the role of a mental kibitzer.

"The girl kept saying, 'Yes, Mister Rayson.'

"My own mind was able to wonder about this. I am Sydney Rayson. My father is Mister Rayson. My grandfather was Mister—

"I was on the point of solving this riddle, when the man that was me for the moment got up, tossed his cigar into a nearby cuspidor, and took the girl in his arms. She didn't seem to mind. She blushed even prettier when he kissed her.

"'Not Mister Rayson,' he admonished. 'Malcolm.'

"Just then the door behind them opened. A large, over-dressed woman blew in. She was full of dangerous curves, but it seemed to me that three pigeons on her hat was just a little too many.

"'Well!' she cried. 'So this is how you behave behind your fiancée's back, you cad. Take that! And *that*!'

"The first that was a hefty clout on the ear. The second was a ring which she removed from her fat finger and flung in his face, nearly knocking an eye out.

"The door banged behind her, smashing the glass. Malcolm Rayson sighed, a relieved sort of sigh, and continued where he had left off when so violently interrupted . . ."

"WHO WAS this guy Malcolm?" I, Lem Mason, asked this precocious

nephew.

"My grandfather, of course!" Syd proclaimed. "His name was Malcolm, and he married his secretary, although at one time he was engaged to his boss's voluptuous daughter."

"How-come you lived in his mind? What's this machine for?" I quizzed. "And why that particular moment?"

"If you'll allow me to finish!" Syd growled, falsetto. "So after this little incident was over I found myself slowly fading out of Malcolm Rayson's mind, and returning to my own body here in the attic."

"I pulled down the lever that shut the machine off, and called it a day. . .

"**N**OW to answer your questions," said this amazing quiz kid. "I lived in my grandfather's mind for a while because that is the function of this machine—to open up unused portions of the mind where ancestral memories are stored, and to let you relive these memories as in a three-dimensional motion picture. I turned the dial two notches—thus, two generations back."

"And the reason I relived that particular moment is because that memory is the strongest in grandfather's portion of the ancestral thread of memory. In grandfather's mind that memory stood out ahead of all others. It was transmitted in the genes, or inheritable elements, to my father, who in turn transmitted it to me."

"In subsequent experiments, I found that it was always the high-point in each ancestor's life that the machine was able to pick up and recreate."

I found an apple on the work bench, and nibbled on it thoughtfully. As I nibbled and thought I stared at Professor Leyton's ancestral juke-box, that Syd had prodded into action.

"Do tell," I murmured, still incredulous. "And did you relive any more

high-points in your ancestors' lives? Further back?"

"CERTAINLY," Syd retorted calmly. "Many of them."

"Tell me about 'em."

"I can't. It would take days, there were so many, some of them so very complex. . .

"For instance, there was Abigail Georgie Rayson, my great-great grandmother, who was subjected to the ducking stool back in Colonial days, for talking in church. That was the most vivid, embarrassing moment of her life."

"There was an English ancestor, Sir Hamilton Fiske-Rayeson, who died in the War of the Roses; there was Agnes Rurson, who was forcibly wedded to a tyrannical Roman general; there was Caracalla, the blood-lusty Roman Emperor, whose appearance in the family ancestral thread springs from no pretty scene; there was Latoto, a slave in ancient Babylon."

"And further back—dwellers in cities that have crumbled into dust, and are now not even listed in the archives of archeology."

"Back, back, back—to ancestors that cowered in cliff caves, conversing in grunts and growls, shivering with terror when the hooves of the mastodons *trampled above their heads like thunder*."

"And even further back. . ."

I blinked.

"Further back? What could be further back than the cavemen?"

Syd's big eyes seemed to be seeing it all again, as he spoke:

"Back to midnight shapes that swung from tree to tree with hairy agile arms; back to things that lumbered over steaming hills and made outlandish unhuman noises; back to things that slithered on their loathesome bellies through primordial slimes. . ."

"My goodness," I hissed. "You *did*

go back!"

My tone seemed to irritate Susie May's nephew. He turned on me sharply.

"You don't believe me!" he accused, pointing a little smutty finger at me.

"Well," I admitted. "It's a lot to swallow all in one lump. And here's another thing, I seem to remember you making a crack about your great-grandson. Just where does *he* come into the three-dimensional motion picture?"

"Ah," Syd sighed, with some satisfaction. "Then at least I know you were listening, not day-dreaming. But you seem to have forgotten one little detail—the *second* big dial, the one marked 'Ahead!'"

"What about it?"

"That dial brought my mind in contact with high-points in my future generations' lives!"

"**A**RE you kidding?" That was all I could think to snort.

He ignored my flippancy. He talked on as though to himself. I champed on my apple, and listened, squinting over at him in righteous doubt.

"You see, lame-brain, Professor Leyton's astonishing purpose seems to have been to accumulate all the knowledge he could, both past and present. Unfortunately for him, his very greed for knowledge was his own undoing. He didn't realize the danger he was putting himself in.

"Nor did I. . .

"Having plumbed the depths of the past, I was all for venturing into the undiscovered realms of the future.

"First—my son. The episode which I—"

"Hold on a minute!" I roared, in protest. "How could any memory from your *son's* mind be inherited *backwards*?"

Syd smiled gravely.

"I thought you'd catch that obvious flaw," he sighed. "But tell me this, Uncle Lem—how did *you* know it couldn't? How do you, or I, for that matter, know what Time is. If Time is accepted as another dimension, then obviously Time exists *all at once* in some way that our three-dimensional minds are incapable of grasping. Such a theory being accepted, there is no 'backward' or 'forward' actually. Only *now*. *Now!* NOW!"

"Does that hint at some explanation?"

I frowned horribly. "Not much." Although the whole thing was beginning to give me a headache, I let him go on with his story.

"Professor Leyton's machine transcends this three-dimensional fallacy regarding Time, and continues the ancestral thread to its ultimate end.

"My glimpses of the future were far briefer, more blurred and difficult than any past images. In this it may be said that Professor Leyton's machine was defective.

"My moment in my son's mind occurred in a lecture room of a large University. He was propounding a new and revolutionary theory, the very theory that I have since been completing, proving. And he was being ridiculed, scoffed at, laughed out of the auditorium.

"This was the result, I guessed, of his lifetime of arduous effort in science. It is my belief that he died a broken and unhappy man. *Will* die, you might say!

"He left a daughter, a weakly creature who lived only long enough to give birth to a son who carried on the ancestral thread. . .

"It was my great-grandson whose mind gave me a glorious thrilling glimpse that was the high-point of high-points in my travels up and down the

ancestral thread of memory.

"He was an old, old man. He stood, still strong and tall and beautiful, on a glass-like precipice that lipped a skyscraper cliff of the radiant and incredible city of the world of Tomorrow. He stood gazing introspectively down at the leisurely flow of life, both above and below him.

"**A**IRCRAFT of feather lightness and breathtaking design sailed smoothly and silently on their accurate designated courses. Far below, on garden streets, pedestrians strolled on marbled ramps, while on other levels ground vehicles moved, like the aircraft, swiftly, silently, smoothly.

"It was dusk, and the miraculous city began to take on a warm colorful glow. The air was soft, clean, sweet. From somewhere came music, strange but thrilling.

"My great grandson mused over this paradise world, and over his own small part in its being. He was an old man, but vigorous, and with many happy years ahead of him thanks to super-medical science.

"This was the world that had fought its way out of blood and chaos, in spite of Hitlers and Tojos, as a wonderful flower fights its way toward the sun, out of fog and dung and noisome weeds. . . ."

"**Y**OU spoke of danger," I said gently, breaking into Syd's reverie.

"Yes." He broke out of his ecstatic mood. "The danger that lurked in the machine's shortcomings, and in Leyton's insatiable curiosity.

"The world of my great grandson was so beautiful to me that I couldn't resist the desire to see even further into the future. I snapped the 'Ahead' dial ahead—

"Then it happened! My mind

whirled, as if caught in some tremendous cosmic vortex. I almost lost consciousness. My head throbbed. Then it was as if a million sharp needles were plunged into it.

"Warned of impending disaster, I grabbed hold of the lever at my right, and pulled it down, shutting off the machine.

"When I was able to think clearly again, I found that something amazing had happened to my mind. . . ."

I nodded my head sadly at that. I could well believe it!

"My mind," Syd went on, eyeing me sternly, "had developed into a super-mind. Knowledge from future generations had leaked into it. I found myself able to solve profound mental problems with ease.

"I was, in point of fact, mentally over a hundred years old—not eleven!"

"Well, I swan!" I exclaimed.

"You goose." Syd quipped dryly.

"And so the defectiveness of Professor Leyton's machine proved of colossal benefit to me. *He* wasn't so lucky, however."

"What do you mean by that?" I queried.

"Understand, I'm only guessing. But all the evidence points to this. . . ."

"Professor Leyton managed to get his machine to bring his mind in contact with the far distant future. He voyaged mentally millions of years into what we call future time, along the ancestral thread.

"He didn't give a tinker's dam about the world of his day and didn't breathe a word of his discovery to anyone. He just stayed up here alone, plunging further and further.

"He was insatiable. He trekked the furthest reaches of his future ancestors' mind-lives; and then to ancestors that no longer were men at all! What gigantic secrets he learned will never be

known. Then, at last, at the very end of time itself—”

Syd broke off with a strangely gruff sigh.

“What happened to him?” I breathed, feeling my skin crawl at the thought of anyone seeing the very end of Time.

Syd got up from where he’d been sitting on the edge of the work bench, and motioned me to come over to the machine. I tossed my apple core away, and walked over.

Syd pointed down under the metal chair that fronted the weird machine, at a large roundish stain. It was an unpleasant blotch, green and brown, soaked indelibly into the unpainted floor-wood of the attic.

“That, I think,” said Syd dramatically, “is Professor Leyton!”

I LEAPED back a step, uttering a squawk. Then, gulping, I went back to my apple box.

“Now what?” I said, anxious to shake the attic’s dust off my heels. “We can still make the baseball game if—”

“Baseball!” Syd snorted. “You, Lem Mason, are going to sit down on the metal chair. You don’t believe anything I’ve told you, so I’m going to *prove* it to you! I’m going to send your mind back into the past, along your ancestral thread!”

I bounded up.

“Me?” I squeaked. “I should say not! Why, Syd, I-I-I believe you. Sure I-I-I do.”

I made for the attic door.

“No you-you-you don’t. Come back here, you coward!” His voice was scornful. His arms were crossed, like a gestapo leader’s.

“Who’s a coward?” I protested weakly. “But, Syd, how about Professor Leyton—he’s only a blob on the barroom, I mean attic, floor. I don’t relish the thought of being a blob on—”

“It happened because he tried to delve too far into the future,” Syd snapped. “Besides—you don’t believe any of my story! You think I’m wacky! How could a machine that an eleven-year-old boy whipped up out of tin cans and old bottle caps hurt you?”

He sounded very contemptuous and sarcastic.

I didn’t say a word, but I was thinking lots. Maybe that machine *was* made by Professor Leyton, like Syd said. But maybe working with it had unhinged his mind, made him a bit pixilated. Gosh, I didn’t want to rush home to Susie May talking like a man from the Moon!

Still and all, the last thing I remembered Susie May saying to me was, “Humor him, Lem, dear. Play any kind of games he wants you to. He’s a sensitive child. All he needs is to be understood.”

Understood! How could I understand all his high-falutin’ double-talk about ancestral threads? Gosh, I’m only a humble bookkeeper down at Mammoth Cement.

I sniffed uncomfortably, then turned and shuffled slowly back to the machine. Syd stood there with his arms crossed, like a Spanish inquisitor.

“Okay,” I muttered unhappily. I sat down gingerly on the metal seat. “Only not too fast. I can’t stand to go too fast.” My own words made me giggle nervously.

“Take this capsule,” Syd ordered, handing me an ominous green pill.

I tried to swallow it, choked over it, coughed, sputtered, and slapped my knee. The capsule stuck in my throat, poised, then dropped. I looked at Syd with reproachful tear-filled eyes.

“How far back would you like to go, Uncle Lem?” he asked, kindly.

“Lemme see,” I pondered, half-believing I *could*. “Oh, yes — two

notches back, please. Grandpop was supposed to be a rootin' tootin' bad man in some old Western town. He was a real tough guy called Fearless Murgatroyd, with a blazing six-gun in each hand, and everybody scared to death when he swaggered through town. Be nice to visit him, huh?"

"CERTAINLY," Syd agreed gravely.

So I grabbed hold of the two metal handles in front of me, while Syd managed the dials and levers. And then suddenly I was whirling, dipping, sliding, falling—as if I was riding all the concessions down at the beach at once.

"Yeow!" I yelled, trying to let go. But I couldn't. The handles stuck as if glued to me.

Blurredly I saw Syd adjust dials.

Then all was blackness for a while.

Somebody had hold of me from the back, and swung me through the air and bounced me onto the hard ground.

I squirmed and struggled, and gurgled and guggled. The person who had hold of me by the top of my britches laughed. It was a rasping, sneery laugh.

And that laugh was echoed on all sides.

Everything was still black. Then, my eyes were opened.

I blinked.

A bright golden light blinded me. The sun. The hot noonday sun of the desert.

I was talking, jabbering at a terrific pace. Or at least the body I had intruded into was jabbering. It was ranting, begging, pleading.

"Don't do it!" grandpop (I supposed it to be he) kept screaming in deathly terror. "Don't hang me!"

"Heh, heh," chuckled the geezer who dandled grandpop up and down by the top of his dusty blue pants. "Nah, we won't string him up, will we, fellers? Heh, heh!"

That heh-heh was an evil heh-heh. And the words only served to scare grandpop worse.

I gandered around me, through grandpop's eyes.

Where was I? I wondered. And what was the reason for all this stringing up of grandfathers?

Fearless Murgatroyd, alias grandpop, was the central figure of a little knot of evilly heh-hehing miners and cattlemen in loud shirts, dusty overall pants, and greasy hats. Fearless Murgatroyd was a little runt, with a wisp of a straw mustache that quivered like an aspen leaf, right now.

The group of men and their horses stood under a huge dead, though staunch, oak tree that had a heavy low-hanging branch. That branch was significant.

Half a mile back along the horse-trail was a drowsy little desert town, sleeping in the sun.

It was plain as a pikestaff that grandpop had been jogged along that trail from town, yanked off his horse by the big galoot under this tree ceremoniously; and it was obvious to the veriest dunce that Fearless Murgatroyd was the unhappy nucleus of an old-fashioned necktie party.

Some high-point in my ancestral thread I had picked out!

HAD I been master of my soul at that moment, I would have joyously winged my way back to my original Lem Mason body and thanked my lucky stars that the "good old days" were gone forever. But that, alas, was not in my power.

Meanwhile Fearless Murgatroyd kept on begging and pleading in a steady incoherent babble, his bony knees failing under him every now and then. The big galoot kept him from sinking to the ground in a miserable

heap.

"Don't ha-ha-hang me!" he bleated.

Over and over and over. I wanted finally to yell out, your point is made, pass on to something else!

I could see that these brown-skinned, horny-handed, dirty-booted blockheads were getting a great big bang out of the fuss grandpop was kicking up. It was quite a picnic.

They laughed and laughed. The big galoot laughed loudest of all.

The horses champed dispiritedly at the straggly clumps of grass that spotted the desert's edge, flecking flies off their rumps with their tails and eyeing the proceedings with great disinterest.

I had solved the problem of where I was, more or less, and what was up. But the question of *why* still worried me. What had Fearless Murgatroyd done to deserve such an ignominious fate?

"Grandpop, you old fraud!" I wanted to yell. "What are you doing here, when you should be shooting up towns and scaring people to death, instead of shivering like a licked pup?"

"Karp," the galoot who was holding Fearless Murgatroyd up, uncomfortably, wanted to know. "Yu got the rope ready?"

"Yep," a bleary-eyed critter with two front teeth missing replied, with a grin. He held up a lasso that he had transformed into a knotted strangler.

"Toss it up over thet branch, Karp. An' tie it tu one of the horses." The galoot was evidently in charge.

"Shore nuff, Sampson."

Fearless Murgatroyd's fascinated eyes watched the rope swing over the branch that was ideal for their purpose, and watched Karp tie it deftly to the saddle of his horse.

"Think it'll hold him?" somebody in the back row speculated.

"This yere runt?" Sampson scoffed, bouncing grandpop up and down like a puppet. "Sakes! It held thet twenty pound outlaw Eagle-beak Larmont last week, didn't it?"

"Real purty hangin' it was," somebody else reminisced. "Not quite so hot as 'tis today."

There was but one word for it, and that was—ghoulish.

I shivered, longing to be back in the attic, back in my own body. Horrible thoughts plagued me. Thoughts about Professor Leyton, the smear on the attic floor.

And there was little Syd's mental transformation, too. What sinister thing might happen to me? When grandpop died, wouldn't I die too?

FEARLESS MURGATROYD bawled like a newly born doggie when Sampson swung him over into position for the kill.

Grandpop wriggled and twisted helplessly as he dropped the noose over his head. Then, carefully, as if he was trimming a birthday cake, Sampson tightened the knot in place and got everything in apple-pie order.

"I ain't had no proper trial!" Fearless bawled, tears streaming down his dirty face, into his mustache.

"Ain't we just giv yu a trial?" Karp retorted. "An' didn't yu *admit* yu stole them hosses offa Pete Morrison?"

"I stole 'em. Yu can tell thet from the brand." Fearless was repentant and anxious to save his hide any possible way. "He can take 'em back, and mine too. Only, leave me go this time fellas. I won't do it again, honest."

He ended off in a doleful blubbering.

"Sorry, Murg," Sampson said, with a wink at the others. "F't was only one hoss we maybe could see our way clear to let yu go. But *three* hosses is too many!"

"Sorry, Murg!" echoed the others. "We cain't do it!"

And then they were silent. Ominously silent.

Grandpop Fearless shut his eyes tight, as he had on the horse ride to his doom. As for me, I was as good as dead already.

But the death jolt didn't come. Apparently the audience hadn't enjoyed the suspense quite to its furthest stretching point yet. They wanted to prolong their fun.

"Yu see, Murg, yu ol' coyote," Sampson broke the silence, poking Fearless in the ribs until he opened his eyes. "It ain't only the hosses. It's the lies yu go spreading around these hyar parts. Lies thet yur such a tough hombre, and how the rest of us is allus crawlin' tu yu on our bellies. We don't hanker much for thet kind of talk, Murg."

"I won't do it any more! Honest!" Fearless whined.

"I'll say yu won't!"

Fearless shivered violently. His cracked lips emitted a weird moan.

"Now say, just say fur instance, Murg—if we *did* let yu go—would you stop all this year swell-headed braggin' and boastin'. An' quit callin' yourself Fearless Murgatroyd?"

Fearless could hardly believe his ears. Nor could I hardly believe his ears.

"W-W-What?" he squeaked.

Sampson repeated. A guffaw was unleashed from back of them.

"Yessir. Yessir. Yessir!" Fearless bobbed his head up and down until he all but strangled himself with the noose that circled his neck. "I—I—I'd go far away! I wouldn't call myself nuthin'. I—I—I wouldn't brag about nuthin'. I wouldn't hardly even say nuthin'!"

Sampson seemed to weigh this in his mind.

"What say, fellers," he said at last.

"Shall we let Murg off if he promises to behave himself, an' go away, an' not brag about hisself any more?"

Grandpop's eyes searched the mob's anxiously.

"Shore," Karp spoke up. "Put Murg onto his hoss, and tell him to high-tail it out of these parts for good!"

Several voices affirmed this suggestion.

So Sampson lifted the rope from around Fearless Murgatroyd's throat, and allowed him to wipe the tears and sweat off his face with his blue bandana.

Then the burly leader swung grandpop up on his horse.

"Thanks, fellas," Fearless muttered weakly.

Sampson's riding whip touched the horse's flank, and away rode Fearless.

Away into the desert. Away from the tree of evil fruit. Away like the wind, in a cloud of desert dust . . .

"AAAAHHHH!" I sighed, coming out of the past.

It had seemed hours, but in reality had all taken place in a few minutes. A very crucial few minutes.

"Now do you believe me?" Syd demanded, as I tottered up from the metal chair.

I felt of my arms and my legs, and my neck. Especially my neck. They were okay. I was back safe and sound, just as I had been before, except for the knowledge of that awful experience back in the days of the wild and woolly west.

"Yes," I had to say. "I believe you, Syd. But you'll never get me to sit in that chair again! No, sir!"

I started to tell Syd what had happened to me, but he didn't seem much interested. He was fussing with test tubes full of chemicals, pouring them into different glass parts of the machine.

"Shut up, Uncle Lem," he told me.

"I'm concentrating. Yes. Yes."

He went on muttering and working this way for some time, ignoring my existence.

"It's done!" he yelled at last.

"What's done?"

"Listen, Uncle Lem," Syd cried, his eyes glowing excitedly. "I've managed to repair the damage Professor Leyton did to the machine when he went into the future too far. *

"I've refueled it, so to speak. Now I think that I can go further into the future myself, further than just three generations. That's nothing to the wonders I'll see now!"

"Now?" I repeated.

"I'm ready to try it right now!"

"No, Syd," I said, taking hold of his arm. "Too much is really enough. Don't tempt Fate. I mean, let well enough alone, and come downstairs with me. I'll buy us some ice cream. No. No, Syd. Remember Professor Leyton, the smear on the—"

"Quiet!" Syd snapped. He swallowed a capsule, and sat down in the metal chair, grabbing the handles. "You stand by, Uncle Lem. Watch out for any trouble that might develop."

"But I don't know anything about —" I protested.

Syd didn't even hear me. He was already under the spell of the machine—traveling up that ancestral thread.

I stood by Syd, whose body became stiff as a board. His eyes became glassy. He looked like a youthful corpse.

I felt very helpless.

I got scared, too, and wanted to do something. But I didn't know what to do, and was afraid I might do the wrong thing.

So I just stood there, waiting and biting my fingernails.

All of a sudden Syd's hand moved stiffly up to the "Ahead" dial, and

slowly, mechanically, began to turn it.

Click . . . click . . . click . . .

I chewed my nails, and kept my eyes glued on that dial.

FOR quite some time I kept my anxious vigil. My legs prickled, and my hands got stiff. I remembered Professor Leyton's dreadful fate, and was scared for Syd. He was venturing into that dangerous future territory, where Leyton had met his doom!

And what about *me*?

Suppose something did happen to Sydney? What would Susie May say? What would the world say? Who would believe my fantastic story?

Likely as not, the papers would refer to me as "The Attic Fiend."

How would they realize that Syd wasn't a boy of eleven mentally, but a giant brain who read Einstein, and concocted outlandish theories of his own as well!

Then, suddenly, something went wrong. I could feel it, even before it happened. The machine was acting up!

Syd's body began to writhe. His lips gave out a rasping sound. He seemed in terrible agony.

Then, visibly, his head began to *shrink*!

Good Lord! In a few minutes he, too, would be nothing but a blotch on the attic floor!

"Moses on the mountain!" I moaned, waving my arms about helplessly.

Something horrible was occurring. I had to do something. But quick!

But *what*?

I turned my eyes to the machine. That labyrinth of knobs, dials, levers, switches, bulbs and gauges. Shouldn't I maybe turn some of them?

In my trembling perplexity I seemed to recall dimly something Syd had said—about a certain lever. The lever that shut the whole machine off. . . .

"My sainted Aunt!"

The machine was *growling* ominously. And the metal parts were getting red hot. And beginning to *sizzle*!

Which lever was it? Which one?

Oh yes yes yes. This one over here on the right.

I seized it with both hands, and yanked it down.

Then I grabbed Syd off the metal chair, carried him over to the other side of the room, and set him down gently on the dusty floor.

Not a split-second too soon!

A cacophonous explosion rent the air.

I whirled.

Professor Leyton's machine was now only a tangled mess of smoking debris. The glass was shattered. The metal middle had burst open, pieces had flown about that side of room pell-mell. The bowels of the machine protruded grotesquely.

I gaped at it imbecilically.

"Eeek!" someone screamed shrilly behind me.

I turned sharply.

It was Susie May, framed in the attic doorway, wearing that cockeyed waste basket hat she bought on our honeymoon in Las Vegas.

"Hello, Susie May," I said. I felt guilty, for some unknown reason.

"Lemuel Mason!" she cried, her eyes popping out of her head almost, at what she saw. "What on earth have you been up to!"

"Nothing," I said weakly. I waved an arm in protest.

Then Susie May saw Sydney, lying on the dusty floor. She gave out another shriek, and ran to him. She lifted his head and began to stroke his forehead.

"Poor Sydney! He might have been killed by you, and your infernal monkey shines!"

"Me?"

"Get some water, Quick!"

I got some water, quick. But I was speechless. It would be sheer folly to attempt to tell Susie May the truth. All I could do was wait for Sydney to come out of his trance, I hoped, and explain the whole thing. That would prove my innocence of alleged monkey shines.

I LOOKED down at the boy anxiously, while Susie May put her Red Cross nurse's training to good use. As she bathed his head she heaped a pile of imprecations on mine.

Pretty soon Syd groaned, and opened his eyes.

"Hyah, Aunt Susie May," he greeted. "Hyah, Uncle Lem."

"Well, Syd, old kid," I grinned, lifting him up, and starting to carry him downstairs. "Looks like when you put all those chemicals in the machine you over-juiced it, and made it blow up. Thank goodness it didn't blow *you* up!" I was much relieved to see that Syd's head was normal size again. Maybe I had only imagined it shrinking.

"Anyway," I went on, "we can go downstairs and read some more Einstein, eh, Syd?"

Syd leaped to the floor.

"Einstein? Machine? What the dickens are you talking so funny for, Uncle Lem?" His eyes became large, furious. "And do you mean to tell me you kept me cooped up in that hot attic all afternoon, fooling around, and missing the Sunday baseball game?"

THE END

GET UP-TO-DATE ON THE SHAVER MYSTERY!
READ THE SENSATIONAL JUNE ISSUE!



ECONOMICS



SCIENCE OR PRETENSE?

AN AMAZED Wall Street recently witnessed a let-down in its stock exchange activities. The technical recovery was insufficient to make up the drop in the worth of stocks. With reconversion supposedly on the upward trend, business men both small and large have tried to keep their eyes closed, just as they did in the war years, to everything but immediate profit.

Wall Street hopefully explains that the snarl resulted because of poorer outlook on account of labor difficulties. It would be very nice if the paper they are using would suffice to wrapping the package. The truth is that no such simple explanation can be given for flip-flops in a market that is the early and general index of nation-wide conditions. There are conditions both controllable and uncontrollable at work.

The controllable factors in the situation are the manipulations of the boys with the heavy sugar, the people who, as families or as individuals (about half-a-dozen of them), are not only controlling, but dictating, the affairs of nearly fifty per cent of major American enterprise. In the abstract, these factors may be referred to as the monopolistic squeeze, brought about by men who can act at their own discretion as bulls or bears in the stock market, who can curtail or increase production at will. These people, in short, wield a determining club in our economic jungle. They literally have the power of determination as to whether depression or boom conditions predominate.

The uncontrollable factors are the people themselves and their economic status in accordance with the efficiency of the system of distribution. The savings of Willison Reichert, steel-worker, the Ryan family, and the Williamses were the gilded and seen yesterday by most of the people engaged in commercialism, which is a polite term for petty imperialism. But those savings have been beggared for the most part, where they existed at all. Despite all blatherings to the contrary, the strikes following the fervid war-time were not the result of the average person's lust for the almighty dollar, because his lack of that lust is what keeps him average. Those strikes were the answer of the people to an inflation already pressing them to the wall. At the end of the war, virtually all business executives revised their activities according to the standards of 1941. Many men were dusted off the rolls of industry. Those who remained were put back upon 1941 wages with no allowance whatsoever for an inflated standard of living. Few of this group had any substantial amount of savings, and those few have given these savings up to the rising prices of necessities

and through the "uncontrollable" strikes.

During the last fifteen years the buffer group of the so-called middle class has gradually dwindled. With its melting has gone many of the very small investors, whose interest in the stock market was a stable one. They sought merely a reasonable return for the use of their accumulations by business.

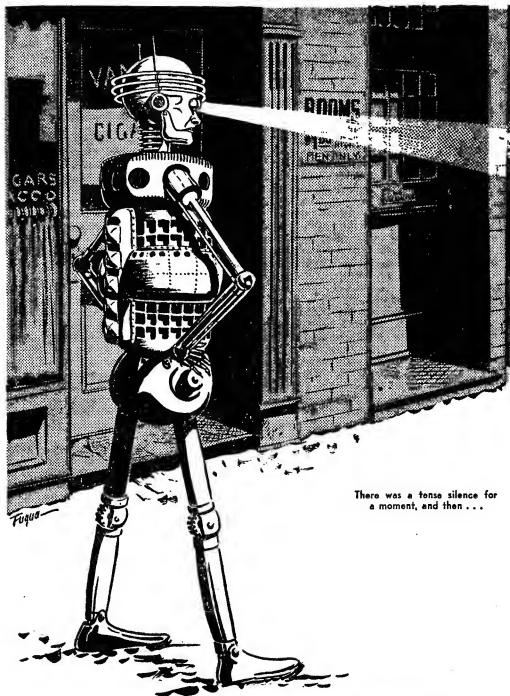
The current stock market irregularity, much like that before the 1929 fiasco, is a reflection of the fact that commodity prices have reached the point where the small investors and even some of the average ones are having to let go their stocks and bonds in order to keep pace with inflation and live as they are accustomed to living.

Less than a month ago, some ostrich wrote that money is practically growing on bushes, now is your golden opportunity, go into business and all the similar clutter. Probably his head is out of the sand now and he realizes that the seller's market is sinking into the depths of the ocean of deflation. But perhaps he was well-paid for his pernicious brand of propaganda.

Business failures are double the number they were a year ago. The lure of the sucker's money, now a non-existent will-o'-the-wisp, will continue to draw members of the optimist clubs on to financial ruin.

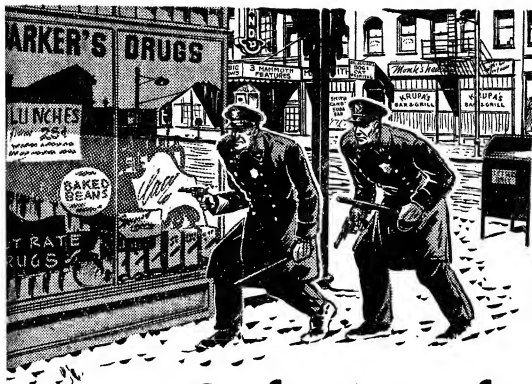
After the first War, it required two years for business repression to take place. But the "past" War took so many inconceivable billions out of America by inflation, and required such stupendous financial manipulations that special business machines were required to record the sale of a box of carpet tacks. The comparison between the two lovely debacles that most of us have had ring-side seats to view is not worth mentioning. The first War might just as well be completely disregarded. When your older brother was killed in the first War, it only cost about ten thousand dollars to accomplish his decent burial, but when your son was killed in the battle of the now-firmly-united nations, it ran us a good bit more than that figure to put him away. The magnitude of the living repression about to descend upon the Browns across the street and the Harrisons in Albuquerque will exceed the "business recession" after War I by about the same amount as Jumbo, the elephant, exceeds Elmer, my neighbor's pet bandy rooster.

What is this fiasco that we are naming civilization and swearing at? As some folks might say, "This looks like where I came in, only it's that way all the time!" Yesterday it was Hoover, today it is the OPA, tomorrow . . . ?—*John McCabe Moore.*



There was a tense silence for
a moment, and then . . .

**I stood there, hands on hips, my eyes
glaring at the two policemen, who stood as
though they were facing an awful menace. . .**



Confessions of a Mechanical Man

by Buzz-Bolt Atomcracker

DEAR MR. PALMER:

I am a robot looking for a job and I wonder whether you can use me in your office.

What are you blinking about? I expect blinks and stares from most people, but I thought the editor of AMAZING STORIES would be just the guy to understand. Wait till you see me. I have a satin-silver forehead and a chromium-plated smile. I have an iron will, a steel determination, and in case you need help handling your tough customers, I can come up with plenty of brass.

When I snap my stainless steel teeth together they click like a meat cleaver on an anvil.

I'm only ten months old but I'm learning fast.

Almost any sort of job will do, just so it's something amazing. I'm a pretty versatile hunk of ore—refined, of course, and highly polished. When I haven't anything else to do, I shine my ankles and knee caps with silver polish for the sheer pleasure of feeling bright.

I'm very strong for my size, in case you wish me to lift your car up and

grease it or move your front porch around to the other side of the house.

I stand six and a half feet tall and weigh nearly six hundred pounds, nevertheless I'm light on my feet, and speedy. I have rollers built into my soles so I can keep pace with the traffic on any pavement. In some ways I think I'm quite an improvement over the ordinary flesh-and-bone human being, but since there's only one of me, I don't often find anyone that agrees with me.

My metal fingers are swift and clever. You'd be surprised at how clever I am at filing cards or running the typewriter, if you need a stenographer. I can also chew gum and giggle, and I suppose I could sit on your lap, though I'm rather heavy. V. V. Blackridge, my recent boss, never cared for that sort of thing anyway.

If you need an errand boy, I can run nights as well as days. The Williams Brothers, who manufactured me, equipped me with headlights. Also a parlor reading lamp, built into the visor around my forehead. Also a tail light—which glows doubly bright whenever I'm embarrassed.

Speaking of the Williams Brothers, you'd probably like to know how they happened to manufacture me in the first place. So I'll tell you all about it, and also about my first job. Then you'll know whether we can do business.

CHAPTER I

Out of My Crate

FOR me, life began when I began to realize that Madge LaGrange was a very lovely girl who worked—much too hard—over a desk in a real estate office. She was blond, beautiful (so everyone said), a trifle plump and quite soft (as judged by my metallic standards). It was her nature to be cheerful and good-

humored. But she had a boss, V. V. Blackridge, who was too stupid to appreciate her.

Blackridge was a grouchy old bear, not a bit like his two nephews, the Williams brothers. They're the inventors, you understand, who gave birth to me.

The ink flew one day in Blackridge's real estate office.

"You can't talk that way to me!" Madge LaGrange exploded, and suddenly she picked up an ink bottle and hurled it straight at her boss.

Kerspat!

Blackridge caught it right on the crest of his bald head, and those three pet hairs stuck up like three black wires. The ink rolled down over his nose, and I thought to myself, "Blackridge!"

At the moment the name fit him perfectly.

He grabbed for his handkerchief and began smearing. At the same time he took three swift strides toward Madge, and I saw there was going to be trouble.

Yes, I *knew* it. I *understood*. I was *thinking*.

Time out, please. It sounds impossible for a mechanical man to think, doesn't it? Time out, while I make a few little explanations.

All credit to the Williams brothers. When they manufactured me, they supplied me with some special thinking equipment, bless their hearts. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to write this story. They put their very best genius into me, and that's the reason I've got to make good. I'm their number one all-around robot.

Actually, I'm number thirty-three among their robot experiments. But the first thirty-two were specialized mechanisms. Some could cook. Some could answer telephones. Some could read

music. Some could do statistical operations.

I was different because I was created as something flexible and adjustable, not specialized.

Moreover, I had one revolutionary improvement over the other thirty-two. I was given a cupful of *brain tissue*.

This was experimental, of course, not standard equipment. And it was destined to cause plenty of trouble for me. But you can see how highly important this could be as an instrument for organizing all my other gadgets. It gave me a storehouse for my experiences—a protoplasmic base for my memory. It gave me a means of reflecting upon all the ideas that came my way, and of sifting them, so that I could meet my new troubles halfway.

To look at me, you might guess that my cupful of brains resides in my head, the same as a man's or an elephant's. Not so. The Williams brothers sealed this bit of treasure *inside the gleaming brass case which hangs in my chest*.

Where you have a heart, I have a brain. My brain weighs about a fifth as much as your heart, but it is surrounded by a case full of mechanisms that weigh all of seventy-five pounds.

This brass case is shaped like a thick watch. It's as big around as a plate, and the mechanisms within are at least a million times as complicated as a watch. And along with the mechanisms, tuned to catch impulses from the brain tissue, are the provisions for sustaining life in that same precious bit of tissue.

A few ounces of life and hundreds of pounds of machinery—that's me.

THE *real me* is, more accurately, that *inner part* of the mechanical man—that giant brass watch case which has the fun of directing this man-like metal shell around me. Most of the

time it's great sport. Even when I get into trouble—like on that day when Madge threw the ink bottle. I'm coming to that in just a minute.

You wonder how I happened to be there?

Two weeks earlier, the Williams Brothers had told me I was all done, stamped and tested, and ready to go out into the world. My feet were ready to walk. My arms were ready to lift. The headlights, looking like two eyes in my metal head, with moving yellow rings around them, were ready to cut a path of light through the darkness.

But the Williams brothers had a certain corner of the world that they wanted me to fill, and a certain duty for me to perform.

"Obedience is the first lesson of life," Herb Williams would say to me over and over. "One who does not know about this world *must obey* until he learns to make his own judgments."

Waldemar Williams, the older of the two brothers, would shake his iron gray head and say, "I doubt if he understands what you're saying. He'll have to make his own mistakes."

Waldemar was right, I understood very little of their problem. They wanted to trust me to use my own powers, but they were afraid.

"First you'll have to get your bearings," Herb Williams went on, lecturing me very earnestly.

I responded by waving an arm as smoothly as a breeze. Then I tapped the silent mechanism of the elbow.

"I'm not talking about your roller bearings," Herb said patiently. "I'm not worried about that part of you. It's your mental bearings."

"Too complicated," said Waldemar, shaking his head.

They wrapped me in brown paper all around and crated me, then gave me a ride in a truck. All the way to Black-

ridge's real estate office Herb kept talking to me.

"You're not to move. You're just to stand like a statue, for days and days, until we come again. That's our first lesson in obedience. Just stand. Stand. Stand. Do you understand?"

Stand. Stand. Understand. Get my bearings. Not roller bearings. Mental bearings.

Waldemar took from his pocket a dark object that might have been a pocket camera.

"If you forget—if you get into trouble—we'll know. This instrument will tell us. We have a way of *freezing* you if you forget and start to make motions."

"There'll be people around you," Herb continued. "Later, after you've got your bearings, you'll work with these people. They are my uncle and a friend. They are very busy. They'll need your help. You must watch them to see how they work."

They unloaded me, rolled me on a little cart into the real estate office, and placed me near the front door, quite upright.

"Here's some new equipment, Uncle," Herb said. "I want to park it here for the present."

V. V. Blackridge said, "A file cabinet? We've got plenty." His voice was low and guttural, like the grind of a machine that is being choked with the wrong kind of raw material.

"**N**O QUESTIONS now, Uncle," said Herb. "We'll explain later. Don't open it yet. We'll come back one of these days."

"Ah! A mystery!" Madge said, looking up from her typewriter with an interested smile.

"Ugh! Those letters, Miss La-Grangel!" This surly growl from Blackridge caused the girl to turn back to her

work. Her expression was odd and it stayed with me, so that later I understood more clearly just what it implied. That half amused glance she shot at Herb Williams showed that she knew, and he knew, that her boss' hard command was out of order. She was obeying simply to humor him.

"Take it easy, Uncle," Herb said. Then he and Waldemar left me.

I was to stand. I was to obey by remaining motionless. I was to watch and listen and get my bearings. Later I would work here. Meanwhile, neither the boss nor the pretty girl working for him knew anything about me. All they knew was that a wooden crate containing something wrapped in brown paper had been parked against the front wall of their office.

They were curious, of course. But the Williams brothers had asked them not to open me. And as I later learned, the Williams brothers owned this real estate office. They had bought it a long time before and turned it over to their Uncle Blackridge to give him something to do.

So V. V. Blackridge and Madge La-Grange both obeyed and left me alone. And I, in turn, obeyed, and stood perfectly still for two weeks, absorbing what I could of their business. Until *that day*—

There were openings in the coating of brown paper, so that some of my ten little eyes could see out.

Yes—*ten*. Does that seem so strange for a mechanical man? I find them all very useful. Probably you wouldn't guess they are my eyes. They look like little jeweled, blue, five-pointed stars, and they are located at various points *not* in my head (remember, those two dark orbs in my face are my headlights) but rather *in the brass brain-box that is really me*. Brain, eyes, ears, and mechanisms of smell are all a part of this

big brass watch—this inner me. Light waves reach me very readily through my dark plexiglass chest and shoulders.

For two weeks I watched the customers come and go. I heard the telephone ring several hundred times a day, and listened to the irate voice of the boss, picking up the receiver, listening a moment, and shouting, "No vacancy!"

In contrast, I was pleased by the soft answers of Madge when she answered the phone. "I'm sorry, there's no vacancy at present. Would you care to call back in a few weeks?" Or, "Will you please leave your number. I may have something of interest later in the week."

Through the nights I stood in solitary reflection, listening to the gentle hum of night traffic.

At noons, on sunshiny days, I would cease to be a statue for just long enough to shift the position of my ten star-like eyes. The flicker of shadows from what I later learned was an elm tree directly in front of the door, out on the parking, provided a fascinating show through the openings in my paper covering. I would turn just a trifle to get the full benefit. But if I rustled the paper, Blackridge would look up sharply and growl.

"Now what did that?"

But Madge would go right on working, knowing that if she answered, he would snap at her to get back to work.

Then one noon the rattle of my paper brought Blackridge up with a start.

"I'm going to see what's in that damned box."

"Please, Mr. Blackridge," Madge protested. "You know they asked you not to." She was smiling, trying to put it politely.

"Who asked your opinion?"

Her smile faded. "I respect the Williams brothers," she said firmly.

"Meaning what? You don't respect me? Is that it?" His eyes blazed anger. He was as touchy as dynamite. "You might as well say it. *You don't respect me!*"

SHE returned his glare. "Sometimes I wonder."

"Shut up! Get your nose back in that ledger and don't let me hear another word out of you today—ugh—UGH!!"

That was when he got it. The ink. Right over the topknot. Blackridge! *Black ridge*, indeed!

"You can't talk that way to me!" she had retorted, and wham, zowie, kerspat, splatter! She had let him have it.

His hands smeared at his face, his eyes flashed fire through ink. He was going toward her, and he drew back a hand to slap. A brutal swing.

Smack!

His inky fingers left marks on her cheek. She gave a little cry. And that was when I burst out of my crate.

CHAPTER II

They Freeze Me in the Nick of Time

THE very rattle of paper would have been enough, no doubt. It doesn't take much to stop a man like Blackridge. Especially when he's in the wrong, and knows he's caught.

The paper rattled, the wood *ripped*, and my shiny steel arms came bursting out into the noonday light. I bumped my elbows outward, the crate splintered, and I pushed out, free, into the room.

Clunk . . . clunk . . . clunk. My steel feet thumped across the linoleum floor. I caught a flash of my bright steel fingers reflected from the surface of a polished desk. I thought I saw the reflection of my bright metal head in

V. V. Blackridge's eyes. Or maybe it was terror. I heard him give a deep-throated, "Uuulp!"

I didn't mind that. He had it coming. My left hand jammed out like a piston rod, and my extended fingers snapped over his throat. His head went kerbump against the wall, so hard that the nearby picture jumped sideways.

There I held him. For just an instant I pulled my punch, to save knocking his head straight through the wall, as I certainly could have done with one moderate blow of my right fist.

It was the scream of Madge La-Grange that stopped me.

"Don't! Don't do it!" she cried. Then her hands went limp, and her eyes went shut, and she slumped down over her chair.

That scared me. I didn't want her to go to sleep. I wanted her to see me return that brutal slap to this hard-boiled old growler.

Knowing what I know now, I guess it was lucky for me she fainted. It just goes to show how little a fellow knows when he gets angry and starts to use his fists. I was really *thinking*, now, and I could feel the thousands of little wheels turning.

Madge was coming to life, breathing slowly, opening her eyes a little. I looked at Blackridge, caught in my left hand, trying with his puny little hands of flesh and bone to pry my steel fingers free. He was kicking at my steel shins, too, with no effect whatever. His face was pink, so I eased up on my one-handed grip. Just a trifle.

Then, making sure that Madge saw me, I administered my punishment. Her eyes widened curiously as I did the deed.

With the finesse of a surgeon performing a delicate operation, I reached over with my free hand and removed

one of those three pet hairs from the top of Blackridge's head.

"Yeee-ouw!" he shouted. "That's mine!"

I glanced at Madge. She was sitting up, now, watching me very intently, and I fancied there was a one-thousandth part of a smile showing through the sternness of her lips. So I deposited the inky hair on the desk, still holding my prisoner, and reached slowly, surely, in the same direction again.

"No. No, don't take any more!" the inky-faced boss yowled.

He shook his head violently, so that his eyes wobbled like ball bearings in a test tube.

But I nodded my head just as decisively, to warn him I wouldn't be stopped. I saw that my response was understood by Madge. There was at least a tenth of a smile visible now, in her parted lips. So nothing could stop me. I would remove those other two pet hairs.

Or would I?

Clink! Something snapped. Something went wrong inside me.

I was paralyzed!

THERE must have been a master switch somewhere within my inner mechanism. Someone had stopped me cold. I was frozen. I could see, I could smell, I could hear. But I couldn't so much as move a little finger.

The Williams brothers! They had done it, of course.

Yes, they had warned me that their pocket instrument would notify them if I became active. So they had received the alarm, at their laboratory, or at lunch, or wherever they were, and they had understood. I had disobeyed. I had broken out and gotten into mischief. And so they had snapped the freeze on me, and here I stood.

Here I stood, holding a struggling,

fretting business man against the wall so firmly he couldn't possibly escape. He yowled for mercy, rolling his eyes up toward my right hand, poised above his bald head, pleading for me to spare those two pet hairs.

Then Madge began to plead, too.

"I don't know what you are, or where you came from. I don't know whether you can understand what I'm saying. But please, if this is a gag, you've gone far enough. Please—"

I couldn't have moved if there had been a flag to salute.

Madge called for the police, and I was still in the same position ten minutes later when they arrived. I was motionless, and Blackridge was still kicking.

CHAPTER III

Dead or Alive?

THE police consisted of Sergeants O'Malley and Cohen. I was impressed by their blue uniforms and their strong handsome faces, and I would have gladly smiled at them if my smile hadn't been paralyzed. My all-around eyes caught a reflection of my ludicrous pose from their silver badges. It looked bad, all right, the way I had Blackridge by the throat.

"What's the gag?" O'Malley said, gulping and staring. "Break it up, there. Break it up."

"You break it up!" Blackridge snarled, looking fierce and inky.

"Don't get sassy," said O'Malley. "How did you get into this mess. What have you got here? A Christmas toy? Where do you wind the darned thing?"

"Careful, O'Malley," Cohen warned. "It's some kind of booby trap. We'd better get the fire department."

"It came out of that box, Officer." This from Madge, who was in the act

of putting on her hat and coat. "I think I'll step out for lunch."

"Lunch, is it?" O'Malley growled. "You'll sit right down and tell us what this is all about. You say it come out of that crate? A sort of grown-up jack-in-the-box, huh? Where did the crate come from?"

The questions and answers flew back and forth, with O'Malley and Cohen exchanging suspicious looks. O'Malley tapped me with his club. I didn't budge.

"Now let's get to the bottom of this," O'Malley said. "You say this crate has been here for two weeks, and just now this collection of hardware bounced out of it for the first time. Why? Why not yesterday? Why not tomorrow?"

"S-s-sh!" Blackridge said under his breath.

"I don't get it," said O'Malley. "Was there something in the air today that caused this tin demon to spring loose?"

"There was ink in the air today," said Madge. "If that creature knows anything—"

"S-s-sh!" Her boss tried to hush her. "Stop the argument and get me out of here."

"I told you don't get sassy," said O'Malley, walking over and thumping him lightly on the knee, but keeping well out of range of my upraised arm. "What's this about the ink in the air?"

"Shall I tell?" Madge asked. Her boss gave a threatening growl. She smiled at him sweetly. It was plain that I had him and the police weren't anxious to pry him loose. "It's like this," she began.

My alert eyes caught sight of the two Williams brothers, then, as they peered in at the side door. You could tell they were getting an earful, all right, the way they listened to Madge's speech. They heard and they saw. The ink marks were on her cheek to prove her story. Of course, she didn't realize they

were listening.

When she finished, O'Malley and Cohen went into a huddle. They came out of it shaking their heads.

"We don't swallow that," said O'Malley. "Maybe he sprang out of the box, like you say. But ink didn't have nothin' to do with it. He just happened to tear loose at that time. You know how these mechanical toys are."

"That's right," said Cohen. "Just get on the phone and get those Williams boys over here to take care of their haywire gadget."

"Just as you say," said Madge, going to the phone.

Then Blackridge fairly screeched. "Ye gods, will you get me out of here!"

COHEN placed his fists on his hips and studied me skeptically. He said finally, "I wouldn't touch the thing myself."

O'Malley walked around to view me from all angles, his cautious eye ever watchful of my upraised hand.

"Just a dead chunk of metal, Cohen. There's no reason why we shouldn't pry him loose. Come here with your club."

They went to work on my arm. They could see that it was jointed. Apparently, it should fold back like a carpenter's rule. But it wouldn't. I could see that the Williams brothers, spying from the side door, were immensely amused.

While the two cops tugged, mystified because I couldn't be budged, Madge returned from the telephone. The Williams boys were both out to lunch, she reported. Now she looked at me with an air of discovery.

"Oh, his eyes aren't spinning any more," she said.

"What's that?" said O'Malley.

"When I first saw him, those yellow rings around his eyes were moving around like cogwheels around light-

bulbs," she said. "That's what made me think he was alive. I mean, the way the outer rims of his eyes kept turning. But now they're stopped. I think he must be dead."

"I'll be dead if you don't get me out of here," Blackridge groaned.

O'Malley tapped my metal head with his club.

"He's dead all right. No question about that."

Cohen nodded. He was growing less afraid of me, at last. He tapped his club against my chromium-plated mouth. No effect.

Clink. The master switch! I saw the Williams brothers snap it. I was free. But the cops didn't hear it, and they went right on examining me. For a moment I held my pose.

"Dead as a string of doorknobs," O'Malley said. "Tell the Williams boys to get a new spring—"

"Look! His eyes! They're *spinning!*" Cohen pointed at my headlights with his club. O'Malley pointed too. My rigid form suddenly snapped into action. I ducked forward, like a serpent striking, and bit the ends of their clubs off.

Before I could spit out the pieces, my eyes were treated to the sight of two blurry blue streaks whizzing out of the room. One was Sergeant O'Malley, the other was Sergeant Cohen.

CHAPTER IV

Blackridge Takes Me to Lunch

V. V. BLACKRIDGE staggered to his desk like a convict who has just missed an appointment with the hangman. He glared daggers at the Williams brothers, who now walked in and sat down.

"Darned sorry this had to happen," Herb Williams said, trying not to smile.

He was a bit slow of speech always, but quick with his eyes. He held the automatic switch box, ready to freeze me if I misbehaved.

"I don't get the idea," Blackridge said stonily. "I try to run a real estate agency. I try to make money for you. You come in with a mysterious crate and I let you park it. Two weeks it haunts my front door. And what does it come to? Practical jokes!"

"Practical *chokes*," said Madge.

"I say it was a mistake, Uncle," Herb repeated. He turned to Madge. "Did it do any harm to you?"

"On the contrary," she said, arching an eyebrow at Blackridge. She touched her cheek where the slap had struck a few minutes before. She knew, evidently, that I had deliberately come to her rescue. That made me feel strangely happy, and I started to do a mechanical jig. Clank-clankety-clank.

"Stop it!" Herb ordered. "Quiet. You've done damage enough."

I obeyed, becoming as motionless as a steel statue. Herb walked around to make sure my metal feet hadn't cut any marks in the linoleum floor. Madge must have decided from Blackridge's angry glare, that there was too much tension in the atmosphere for her. It was time for her to go to lunch.

"I think I'll go with you," Herb said. "You can handle things, Waldemar."

An hour later, Waldemar Williams, Blackridge, and I loafed in a restaurant booth, sipping coffee and talking. I sat in the corner as inconspicuously as possible. (Waldemar had put a folded newspaper under me so I wouldn't scratch the seat.)

"If he's such a useful servant, why doesn't he stir my coffee for me?" Blackridge was saying.

Waldemar turned to me, "How about it, Buzz-Bolt?"

I took the spoon in my steel fingers

and began to stir. Blackridge watched me skeptically. How did he know that I wanted to pour that coffee down his neck?

They went on talking, and I went on stirring. The more I watched Blackridge, the more mischievous I felt. I didn't know it at the time, but it was that bit of human brain tissue that was wanting to get me into trouble. Such devilish impulses! What sort of tricky person had my brain come from anyhow?

"He wants me to cool his coffee," I thought. "Instead, I'll heat it, just to fool him."

So I began sending electrical heat down through my steel fingertips into the spoon. Meanwhile, the older Williams brother continued to explain to Blackridge that I might be trained to become a very useful assistant.

"We've named him Buzz-Bolt," the inventor said proudly, passing his thin fingers through his silvery hair. "Buzz-Bolt Atomtrigger. In time he may develop a sort of personality. We'll see."

A number of people passing by would stop and stare at me for a moment and say to each other, "What is that thing?" or "Am I seeing things? It must be something I ate."

Waldemar would whisper to me to pay no attention—that was something I'd have to learn, he said, and he was right. I went right on stirring.

"**E**NOUGH," said Blackridge, trying out his orders on me. "That coffee ought to be cool—ugh!" He gulped. "Look, Waldemar. The darned stuff's boiling!" He reached for my hand. "Give me that spoon. *Ye-ipp!*"

The spoon fell to the floor, and Blackridge jammed his fingertips to his lips.

Waldemar frowned. "Buzz-Bolt, did *you*—"

Blackridge came to his feet, snorting, clenching his fists. "That thing and I aren't gonna get along, I just know!"

Waldemar Williams must have felt pretty dubious about me then. He gave me one of those I'm-disappointed-in-you looks. He was a pretty stern old fellow, and you couldn't help feeling he was a square shooter. For all my mischievous desires, I'd never have overheated *his* coffee.

"We'll go now," Waldemar said coolly. He paid the bill, and we all walked back, amid the surprised stares and laughing wisecracks of the passers-by. When small boys stop and point at you, you can't help but feel a little self-conscious. But already I was becoming used to it. There was a much bigger worry on my mind.

What sort of person was I going to be?

Was I to go through life playing tricks on people like Blackridge? I *had* wanted to pour coffee down his neck. *Why?*

The natural answer was, that this slice of brain they had given me, to bring me to life, had carried over some habits and impulses from its own mysterious past. I wanted to play tricks. I wanted to *clown*. And I *would*, in spite of anything.

"Don't jump to conclusions," Waldemar was saying to Blackridge. "He may turn out to be a good machine, not a bad one. If he does, we can manufacture his kind on a wide scale. Don't you see, Uncle, we hope to relieve overworked men like you of a lot of drudgery."

"I don't question your good intentions," said Blackridge, again touching his bruised neck.

"Do you realize, Uncle, how you've been grinding yourself down?"

"I wasn't aware that I'm overworked."

"That's just it. This overstrain has crept up on you. You're so busy, you don't see yourself as other people see you. They think you're becoming an automaton."

"Me?" V. V. Blackridge walked a little faster, looking straight ahead. "Who says so?"

"Some of your friends. They say you don't have time to be human."

"Who says? Madge LaGrange, for instance? Let her talk. I'm not impressed."

At the office Herb was fixing up a desk for me. Madge, hard at work, looked up with a quick smile.

"I hear we're to have some assistance," she said.

"I am not impressed," said Blackridge, hanging up his hat and going to his desk. I followed him, for now he was to be my boss.

"Mr. Williams tells me," Madge said, "that this mechanical man can become quite efficient at the telephone—if he can learn to talk."

"I am not impressed." Blackridge said coldly.

"You'll see," said Herb.

"I am not impressed. *I am not impressed. I am not—*"

I PINCHED Blackridge's left ear with my steel fingers. I think he was impressed. He turned pale, in fact, and reached for his throat protectively. But I didn't mean to harm him. Just then his telephone rang, and my long steel arm reached out and picked it up.

Would I answer it?

Everyone was eyeing me, now. Up to this moment I had not spoken a word. There had been some off-sides debate as to whether I could talk. The Williams brothers had urged me to make use of that fine mechanical voice box they had given me.

"Buzzzzz!" I said into the phone.

"Answer it!" Herb shouted excitedly. "Answer it!"

Through my head diaphragm, the sound of the speaker on the other end was vibrated down into my "interior." It was someone asking for a furnished apartment.

"Buzzzzzz!" I replied.

"No, no, no," Herb cried. "Let Blackridge answer."

It was then that I gave them a surprise that Blackridge and Madge would never forget. I answered—in *Blackridge's voice*.

"No vacancy!" The words were perfect Blackridge.

Immediately I added—in Madge's voice, very sweetly, "I'm sorry . . . Would you care to call back later in the week?"

Then I hung up. Blackridge's own voice! And Madge's!

You can hardly imagine what that did to my four observers. Madge was so dumbfounded she couldn't speak. Blackridge went red with a blustering sort of rage. "He's a damned phonograph!"

The Williams brothers were suddenly incandescent with happiness. This was their hour of triumph. They pounded each other on the shoulders, laughing and shouting like a pair of cheerleaders after a Thanksgiving victory.

Both of them tried to explain at once. It was funny, two fellows so slow of speech trying to talk so fast.

"You see, it *was* your own voice, Madge." That was *you*, Blackridge—your words." "No, *not* the mechanical man's voice. *He* couldn't imitate that way. His voice was that *buzz*. It's still raw. He hasn't learned to use it. But he can *record*."

Their jabbering was pretty excited, and I was recording it, too, because I was so interested. The brothers did

their best to explain that I carried a goodly spool of magnesium wire, upon which I might record any of the numerous sounds that fell upon my mechanical ears.

Blackridge was aghast. "Do you mean—do you mean that this compound gadget might have picked up any words I've said here in the last two weeks?"

"It's possible," said Herb, and his older brother nodded.

For some strange reason, Blackridge went quite white.

Then the phone rang again, and Herb gave me the sign to go ahead.

It was another request for a furnished apartment. I answered with the first recorded words that happened to come up. Blackridge's ugly voice: "Shut up. Get your nose back in that ledger and don't let me hear another word out of you today."

That was it. I said it and hung up. And what an icy silence there was all around me. The brothers weren't looking at me, now. They were staring at V. V. Blackridge. They had heard his own words. Words he must have flung at Madge.

"Uncle," Waldemar said slowly, "Sometimes I wonder if you don't need a long vacation."

Blackridge didn't say anything, but somehow I knew he was impressed.

CHAPTER V

A Mysterious Client

OF ALL the passers-by who stared at me and asked curious questions during the next few weeks, the man who impressed me most was a hard-faced man with a silent step and a noisy necktie.

"Well, buddy, you're quite a creature, ain't you? Just like the news-

papers said."

He had edged up to me as if to talk in private while no other customers were around. He had evidently seen some of the newspaper photographs and the newsreels that had shown me at work answering telephones.

In a very suspicious manner he whispered, "How'd you like to take a walk with me some night?"

I didn't answer. I couldn't. Not with my own voice. All I could do with with my own voice box was to make that senseless buzzing sound. Other than that, my speech consisted of playing back the recordings from my wire spools.

When he repeated his question, insistently, tapping my steel head in a very friendly manner, I croaked back to him, in Blackridge's voice, my old standby answer.

"No vacancy."

His name, as I later learned, was Joe Moberly. But for the present I thought of him simply as the man with the purple and yellow polkadot tie, the strong brown cigar and the sinister eyes.

He turned to Madge. "Where'd you get the walking machine, sister?" He saw that she was very busy, so he gestured with his cigar that it made no difference. "Don't mind me. I just dropped in to see your boss about some Simpson holdings on Q street. Go right ahead with your work, sister."

He proceeded to eye me up and down, back and forth. Many people were doing that these days. But not so thoroughly as Joe Moberly.

He strolled across to the window and pretended to read a magazine. He was watching my reflection in the glass. Presently he saw Blackridge coming down the street. He tossed his cigar in the ash stand and walked out.

When Blackridge came in, Madge told him there had been a Mr. Joe Mo-

berly here to see him.

"I don't know any Moberly. What did he want?"

"Something about some Simpson property on Q street."

"Never heard of it."

So Moberly's first visit was forgotten by everyone but me. I remembered—why? Because the man's eyes took in details of my make-up that the average person would have missed. He appeared to be measuring my dimensions and making mental calculations.

I had a hunch Moberly would come again, and he did.

"The newspapers said you might learn to talk," he said, quite guardedly. "How'ya doing?"

"Buzzz-zzz." I replied. Madge turned, and I winked one of my headlights at her. She went on working. Again Blackridge was not there. So Moberly tried to get next to me again, but I disappointed him, because I couldn't talk.

Madge saw that he wasn't satisfied with the recorded answers I gave him, so she tried to help. He asked about some mythical property, and when she went to look up the information in the files, he went to work on me. With a carpenter's rule. He took a half dozen measurements before she got back. Arms, legs, feet, hands, chest, and head.

Two days later he was back again, and this time, while no one was looking, he managed to open the plexiglas doors of my chest. I could have snapped him, but I was curious to see what he was up to.

"Inner pockets . . . Hmmm," he mumbled to himself.

HE WAS fascinated by my insides, all right. I had two rows of card cases built into what should have been my ribs. He could see that I was full of the telephone numbers and addresses

of our clients, but this made little impression on him. Again he was more concerned with taking measurements.

"Take it easy," he whispered. "I won't mix up your files. Just looking around."

I didn't answer. But the second time he blew a puff of that black cigar smoke in at my ten interior eyes, I gently removed the cigar from his mouth and took a puff. For a moment this got his goat, and he drew back, half afraid of me.

"Take it *easy*. Take it *easy*," he muttered.

I jammed the cigar back in his mouth, and soon he was on his way. I had made him nervous, and I thought he might never come back again. If he should come back, I thought, I'd have to play a gag on him that he wouldn't forget. I'd poke that burning cigar down his collar and echo back to him, "Take it easy."

There it was again—that craving to play mischief! Where did it come from? Did the Williams brothers know they'd planted a strain of the practical joker in me?

Later that day, when Blackridge was about to close up shop, he opened my plexiglas chest to check up on my day's work, and sure enough, the cigar smoke puffed out at him.

"Where'd *that* come from?" he growled. "I hope you haven't taken to smoking with the customers."

There was a touch of jealousy in what he said. Poor old hardboiled Blackridge had been finding me hard to take. I had been growing much too popular with the clients. They liked to deal with me, just as they liked to deal with Madge. For one thing, I talked with them in her voice whenever possible. For another thing, there was my chromium-plated smile—but I'll come to that in a moment.

Blackridge pressed me for an answer about the cigar smoke, and I did the best I could. I came back at him with Joe Moberly's voice:

"*How'd you like to take a walk with me some night?*"

Blackridge uttered some profanity. My recorded maunderings meant nothing to him. Just as a warning, I gave his profanity right back to him, and at that he locked his lips. Since that first awful day, when I had exposed his harsh talk and given the Williams brothers an earful of his bawlings-out to Madge, he had guarded his words like stolen pearls. About all he ever said to either of us was, "Get to work."

Can you imagine what effect it had on a hardboiled old boss like Blackridge to discover that I, a mechanical man, was becoming far more popular than he? Was he burned up? You know it!

PART of it, as I mentioned above, was my use of Madge's voice. The other factor was my smile.

What a stroke of genius on the part of my inventors to give me a smile! Herb Williams had patterned the curves of my metal mouth after his own. Madge didn't know that, but right from the first week I could tell that she was strangely fascinated by the pleasant form that my metal lips took when anyone smiled at me.

There was a secret here, all my own. Something I had discovered, watching her and Herb Williams. She didn't dare show him how much she liked him, because he didn't pay any particular attention to her—or at least, so she thought. But back of her fascination for my smile was her secret interest in Herb Williams.

"How's your friend Blackridge?" Herb would say to her casually whenever he'd drop around at lunch time.

"No change," Madge would say. "At

least none for the better."

"I'd hoped that Buzz-Bolt would take enough weight off the old boy's shoulders that he'd have time to be human. Hasn't he taken up golf or bowling, or gone to the movies, or read any books, or attended any baseball games? . . . No? . . . Has he cracked any jokes?"

"Blackridge couldn't crack a joke with a sledge hammer," Madge would say. "I wish Buzz-Bolt could talk. I'll bet he'd crack jokes. That smile of his—" She stopped, and I'm sure she didn't guess what a compliment she was paying to Herb.

"It's all tin," said Herb.

"Anyway the customers like it."

"Just a mechanical trick," said Herb. "You know, everyone smiles when they first see Buzz-Bolt. And what happens? His electric eyes gauge their smile and he automatically matches it with his own. If they smile wide and handsome, so does he."

"I like it," said Madge.

I was smiling broadly then, the same as Madge. It must have been contagious, for Herb was smiling too, just a little. Madge added, "I wonder if he would be bashful if he could talk. It's a sort of bashful smile, don't you think?"

Then, for some reason, she and Herb were looking at each other and they both grew quite red in the face. Whatever it was about, their embarrassment was contagious too, for my tail light came on with a doubly bright red glow. Thank goodness, the telephone rang at that moment. I got back to work.

CHAPTER VI

Night Visitors

THEY had me give a demonstration in one of the display rooms in the

city's finest office building. Two hundred and seventy-five business men looked me over and discussed my merits. Would mechanical men be a good investment as a substitute for their present employees?

They put me through the paces. They had me add and subtract, do bookkeeping, answer phone calls, deal with customers.

And while they sized me up, and marveled at my abilities, I was thinking to myself, "What a serious gang of men! Why don't I cut up a little, to liven up the party?"

"How much does he cost to operate?" "Can parts be replaced?" "Can you depend upon him to obey orders?" "Does he have to sleep at nights, or will he keep right on running?" "Do you have to have a boss over him?"

The Williams brothers did their best to answer all questions. It looked to me as though they might make a fortune, if I didn't make some break and spoil everything.

"Can he sweep the floors? Can he scrub? Can he polish all the office furnishings, including himself?"

I swept for them. I scrubbed for them. Everytime they put a broom or a mop in my hands, I wanted to take a swing at someone, just for pure mischief. But I refrained. Madge was there, and she and the Williams brothers were very proud of the way I was conducting myself.

"Can he wash windows?" someone asked.

They gave me a sponge and a dryer, and I went to work on a patch of plate glass. Then—trouble.

I swear it wasn't mischief. It was that reflection I saw in the glass. The waiter. He was moving through the crowd, serving drinks. But mostly, he was watching me.

It was Joe Moberly.

He moved close, and I saw that he held a small camera under the tray. I didn't see the flash, but I heard the click. He had caught a shot—maybe an infra-red—of my inside workings.

Click—then—*crash!*

I pushed with too much force against the plate glass and, darnest luck! the window went out.

PANDEMONIUM! A whole swarm of officials of this swanky display room pushed up through the spectators and demanded to know what on earth was going on, and what kind of a stunt was this. There'd be damages aplenty!

They were pretty angry with Herb Williams, even though my break hadn't actually hurt anyone. If the glass had fallen over the street, it might have been bad. But it fell on a roof. Nothing serious.

"If you can't handle your iron monster, Mr. Williams," the dress-suited manager said severely, "we'll have the police help you."

That insult was uncalled for, in my estimation, and I picked up the surly fellow in the dress suit, turned him upside down, and stuck his head in the handiest wastebasket. The crowd made way for me, and I reached for another official in a dress suit.

Click!

Waldemar Williams had his little switch box ready, and he suddenly put the automatic freeze on me. That did it. I was as paralyzed and motionless as any cornerstone, and so I remained until the crowd went home.

The last man to take his eyes off me, that night, was, as you might imagine, Joe Moberly. He had kept out of Madge's path, so that no one recognized him. But this I knew. He hadn't missed one important bit of information from the Williams brothers' sales talk. And he hadn't missed much of the dressing

down the brothers gave me after my break. . . .

It was to happen just three nights later.

Somehow I felt it coming, though there were no very definite indications.

The office work was clacking along as usual. New clients came, always to be disappointed because of the general shortage of available apartments. Old clients came in to collect their rent, to buy, to sell, to discuss their problems. Occasionally someone would tell of making several hundred thousand dollars, and Blackridge's dark and gloomy mood would brighten for a few moments.

Then the mood would pass, and he would scowl deeper than ever.

The exterminator came, and Blackridge had him spray the inside of my chest, along with the other dark corners of the room. Just one of the boss's reminders that I was no more important than a filing cabinet.

Herb Williams came in on some pretext, and decided that he and Madge had just as well have dinner together. When they returned to the office, I learned that they had decided to make an evening of it and go to the movie.

"Sorry we can't take you along, Buzz-Bolt," Madge said, but I don't think she meant it.

They went, and I was left to the silence of the night, as usual. Those long nights with nothing to do! The worst of it was, they made a habit of locking my feet to the floor every evening after work hours, just to be sure I wouldn't go off on a spree. It was a wise thing to do. They knew it, too, because I had shown a tendency to climb the chandeliers and juggle the furniture and dance all night to the radio during my first unguarded nights. If I had been left completely to my own devices, I'd certainly have taken a streetcar for

a ride on some lonely night.

This was a lonely night until the office clock struck three.

The night's traffic had spent itself. Most of the neons had blacked out. Everything was quiet.

A truck drove along the alley and stopped at the rear door. Its quiet purr choked off. Who could that be? And why?

Presently a key turned in the lock and the rear door opened softly. Two shadowy figures moved into the front office—two men, whispering.

"You sure he's locked?" one of them said.

I had never been more resentful of my paralysis.

"Don't worry, Steve. They freeze him every night. I've checked on that."

I *knew* that low, guttural voice. It was Joe Moberly's!

CHAPTER VII

Presence of Mind, Absence of Body

MOBERLY moved in a wide circle around me. A shaft from the street light passed over his strong face, revealed his unlighted cigar and his polkadot tie. He was chewing the cigar nervously.

"We've got it all our own way, Steve." He was managing to be pretty cocky and self-confident.

"If somebody don't bust in on us."

There was an apprehensive whine in Steve's voice. From his slight stoop, I guessed him to be one of the waiters I had observed at the demonstration a few nights before. He was skinny, yet strongly muscled. His face was pointed and toothy like a rat's.

The two men paused in the dim light for a moment. Moberly moved close to me, tapped my arm, and satisfied himself that I was helpless. Then he gave

some crisp instructions.

They returned to the truck at the rear door. I could hear them unloading a heavy weight. Soon they wheeled it into the front room—a blanketed something as large as a man. When they unwrapped it and inspected it by flashlight, it was revealed to be *another mechanical man*.

It might have been my twin brother.

"I can just see old Blackridge when he tries to make *this* hunk of steel behave," Moberly said. "He'll have apoplexy."

The skinny fellow looked from me to the substitute and breathed a satisfied, "Gee!"

"Not bad, huh?"

"Spittin' image. You're a genius, Mobe."

They had trouble moving me out of my place at the desk. You see, the power was off, and I was paralyzed. The wheels in my feet wouldn't even turn.

Finally they decided the thing to do was lighten my load. They removed everything they could from my full chest—cards and files and shelves, tools and gadgets. Eventually they unhooked *me*—the *inner me*—the big watch-shaped brain case with my ten star-shaped eyes and four sensitive ears.

This being the heaviest removable part, they placed it—that is, *me*—on the desk, and went on about their business. The outer part of me—my metal body—was now lightened sufficiently that they were able to struggle with it. After improvising some rollers, they moved it to the rear door and loaded it onto the truck.

Next, they moved this new mechanical man into my place at the desk. They opened its plexiglas chest.

"Darned if I remember how to pack this stuff back," Steve said, looking over

the scattering of equipment. He started with the files.

"Wait, you dope," Moberly said. "Give me the light. This thing goes in, whatever it is."

"A water cooler, maybe." Steve gave me a shake.

This new metal body was a very crude thing, really. It didn't contain any of the necessary fixtures to fit around me. Of course it lacked the thousands of pin-point triggers through which my brain impulses operated. While Moberly held the flashlight, Steve took pains to wire me in place. They replaced my accessories and then stepped back to study the effect.

"Perfect. Perfect." This from Steve. "Nobody'd ever know the difference."

"The Williams brothers might know at a glance," said Moberly. "But Blackridge won't."

That completed their operations. A moment later I heard them drive away in the truck.

There I hung—an encased brain with no workable body. I was hung up! I was as helpless as a turtle hung by the tail. More helpless. A turtle could at least wink his eyes and kick. All I could do was watch and listen. And wait. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

Sit-Down Strike

THE theft of my metal body occurred at about three o'clock Sunday morning. I waited impatiently for Monday. It was a long wait, and if I could have talked aloud I would have said some bitter things. You can imagine that I felt pretty savage toward the whole world, even the Williams brothers, my makers.

If they had only known!

If they had only trusted me enough

to leave me in possession of my powers through the night! What a proud victory it would have been for them if I could have grabbed a pair of thieves and walked them into the police station!

Monday morning came at last.

Blackridge entered in his usual humor. He barked an order at what he thought was me and went on back to the next room to hang up his coat and hat.

Madge came in on the stroke of nine, looking very lovely in her pink dress and fresh pink cheeks.

"Good morning, Buzz-Bolt."

I didn't answer. She raised an eyebrow in my direction. Through this fake creature's plexiglas shoulders I watched her.

"Are you in a mood this morning, Buzz-Bolt?" she asked as she hung up her coat. "It's a lovely morning—or doesn't the weather make any difference to you?"

I didn't answer.

She added, giving a little laugh, "I'll bet you'd rust in the rain."

She kept on with her one-sided chatter while she watered the plants. Usually I would buzz some sort of response, or draw some appropriate words out of my store of recordings. Usually, too, I would make a few courteous gestures with my metal arms.

Suddenly disturbed, she came over and faced me.

"Buzz-Bolt! Your eyes aren't turning. Has Herb Williams forgotten to turn you on this morning? Or are you ill?"

She went to the phone and called. Her worry deepened. Evidently the Williams brothers insisted that they *had* turned me on.

Blackridge came in on the last of her conversation. He turned his sullen eyes on me and gazed for several minutes.

"Get to work, Buzz-Bolt," he said.

"What is this, a sit-down strike? Give us a buzz, there. . . . You won't, eh? Stubborn! Madge, get those inventors on the phone again. Let me—"

He stopped abruptly, for someone had just walked in the door. It was Moberly. He sauntered up to my desk as brazenly as a counterfeit dollar.

"Morning, neighbors. Fine morning. Oh, pardon me. Go right on with your telephoning."

Blackridge, momentarily disconcerted, turned his back on the newcomer and proceeded with his conversation.

"LISTEN, Herb, this cursed compound gadget has gone on a strike. Now I don't want the damned thing cluttering up my office if he won't work. . . . You'll come over? Both of you?...Surè, the sooner the better...."

When he finished and turned, Moberly was already going out the door. "Be back later," he said.

Blackridge shrugged. Strange clients were always changing their minds.

There was not a thing in the world that I could do but hang in there and watch and listen and *think*.

"What," I thought to myself, "did that brazen thief mean by walking in here first thing this morning?" And right away I thought I had the answer. "Of course! He came back looking for the part he missed last night—*me*."

I could imagine their chagrin—his and Steve's—upon discovering that the mechanical man they'd stolen wouldn't work. What would they do?

I wasn't sure of all my answers, but I guessed, for one thing, that they had made a discovery. They had found that their stolen metal man contained a few thousand tiny triggers that needed to be touched off by some thinking mechanism before the metal man would perform.

So Moberly must have concluded that I, the circular brass case they had discarded, was something more than a water cooler.

But did he mean to steal me here in broad daylight? Or was he planning to come back tonight? Did he understand that the Williams brothers were on their way? Did he realize that they would take one look at this crude metal substitute and know there'd been monkey business?

It was nearly noon, and Blackridge was fuming.

"Why in heaven's name don't they come?" he sputtered. "Look at the work piled up on Buzz-Bolt's desk. All because there's a loose connection somewhere."

He and Madge tapped around on all corners of my substitute frame. Clank—clank—clank. Blackridge took a tack hammer to the metal head, and once he thought the eyes began to roll. Madge tapped the knees with a ruler.

"That's the trouble with these damned gadgets," Blackridge said, passing his hand over his barren top-knot of two pampered hairs, "A million dollars worth of experimenting and what do you get? A dead machine on your hands. . . . ugh. What are you sniffing about?"

Madge looked up with a curious tenderness in her pretty face. "Suppose he is dead. Really and truly, I mean. Poor guy, he's been a real friend."

"Stop that sniveling. He's just a chunk of metal."

"He was kind to me," Madge said quietly, "He never acted cross."

To Blackridge her words evidently were a backhanded thrust. "Stop drooling. You were quite the chums, weren't you? If he's dead, maybe it's a good thing. . . . Stop that sniveling."

But Madge wasn't sniveling, she was just sniffing.

"Do you think he smells all right, Mr. Blackridge?" she asked. "Well, I *don't*. There's something phoney. He doesn't look quite like himself, today, and he doesn't smell right."

The phone rang, and Madge took the message. She turned white and began to stammer. She hung up and turned to her boss. "Get me a taxi."

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Accident. Someone crowded the Williams brothers into a ditch. It wrecked their car and they're both in the hospital. Herb's in a critical condition."

CHAPTER IX

ON THE instant I knew what had happened. What I couldn't have done if I had been free! And here I was, stranded in a metal body as dead as a stovepipe.

Madge taxied off to the hospital. Blackridge called a couple times, and his usual gloom deepened.

Late that night the rear door opened again. I was not surprised. I had known it was coming. It was Moberly and Steve. They had come back for the rest of me.

"Here it is," Moberly said, holding the light on me. "We should have known this was the brains of the gadget."

"Hs-s-sh!" Steve whispered. "Someone's at the door."

"Night watchman, probably." Moberly sounded brave, but he ducked for the deep shadows, right along with Steve. For a long moment there was nothing but tense silence. The clock ticked off the seconds. Presently the night watchman went on his way. I knew his step.

The two men, hiding near the desk beside me, whispered of their plans. What they hoped was that this morn-

ing's accident would take my inventors out of circulation for several weeks—time enough for them to take me apart and learn all of the secrets of my construction.

"There's millions of dollars in this deal," Moberly kept saying, "*Millions*—and all we have to do is beat those boys to the punch before they recover."

"One of 'em may not recover, from what I read in the paper," Steve said.

"That's the least of our worries."

"But the other one may get out in a couple days."

"If he does, we'll get him again," Moberly said. "Sometimes I think we'd be wiser to make a clean job of it. Then we'd have clear sailing, with no competition."

They removed me with utmost care and were all set to leave. But again they ducked for cover. There were footsteps at the front door. A key turned. By the street light I saw the man that entered—a tall man with a bandaged forehead and one arm in a sling. It was Waldemar Williams.

If I had had a heart it would have stopped beating during the next few moments. Everything happened so fast.

My inventor had evidently just come from the hospital. Probably he had slipped away without permission. Although it was still the dead of night, some burning worry had brought him straight to this office. He had come to see about me.

He snapped on the light. He came straight toward me, his eyes ablaze with suspicions.

What happened then was dreadful. I knew it was coming. I couldn't stop it. I heard the two hidden men exchange whispers.

Waldemar held a hand out toward me. "Are you free to move, Buzz-Bolt? I took the switch off. But I hear something's wrong. Do you hear me?"

He took the left hand of my fake body and shook it. He was surprised at how loosely it dangled.

"Why, you're not Buzz-Bolt!"

Those were his last words. For at that instant the right steel hand struck. It swung like a hammer. Waldemar caught the blow on the side of the head. It staggered him.

Moberly's elbow grease was back of that blow.

Steve leaped to the light switch and put the room in darkness. But I could still see. My inventor was down. He was being mauled by an arm of steel, blow after blow.

When, a few minutes later, I was carted away, my ten eyes were full of the horrible sight—Waldemar lying murdered, his bandaged head crushed, and that senseless statue of steel hovering over him with a bloody steel fist.

"They'll get Herb out of the way for sure, now," I moaned to myself, "and then the world will never know. They'll always believe that I did it—that I murdered my own inventor."

CHAPTER X

IN A basement laboratory in another part of the town Moberly and Steve reassembled me.

Again, for the moment, I was complete. But they had chained and bolted my metal body to a steel girder imbedded in concrete. About all I could do was wiggle my steel fingers and blink my headlights.

They brought in three technicians, and made ready with the drafting equipment. They set up a schedule for de-mounting me, bolt by bolt. I watched them empty the shelves and pigeon holes along the wall, to make space for my various parts.

Their plans were interrupted by the noon headlines.

MECHANICAL MAN PULVERIZES INVENTOR.

They read aloud all the gory details. It was dreadful, to think that the man who had worked so hard to create me was gone. And as I heard them chuckle over their success, the very molecules of my steel seemed to fill with fighting anger.

The next day the technicians were ready to go to work on me, when Moberly and Steve came in and stopped them.

"Postpone it, boys. We've got to get him out of here."

They chained me with three hundred pounds of chains and rolled me out to the truck. Steve drove. Moberly talked.

"Just a precaution, Steve. The younger brother in the hospital is talking."

"The papers said he was raving," said Steve.

"All right, raving. But at the rate he's recovering, they may decide to listen to him. And what he says might make sense."

Moberly admitted he was worried. It seemed that Herb was asking the cops to investigate. He was sure that I wouldn't have committed murder.

"Some smart cop might drop into our lab for a friendly visit," Moberly said. "If he does, there mustn't be any signs of Buzz-Bolt around."

They hid me in the loft of an old barn, and covered me with hay. I was chained so tight I could hardly turn. I watched them climb down the ladder.

As soon as they were out of hearing my struggle began.

It was awful. I knew that the news of "my" crime would spread like wild-fire. It would go rough on Herb—if he lived. And poor Madge! I must fight free and tell them the truth. I strained at my chains.

Somewhere in the dim recesses of

my cupful of human brains was a memory. In my previous life—my human life—I must have watched an exhibition of a man freeing himself from such a trap.

In this dim memory he seemed to be tied to a ladder. It was in a huge tent, and a crowd was humming with excitement, watching him try to free himself. And I was running around him, making jokes.

Where did these memories come from?

I struggled, not like a mad man, but like a clever stunt man. As if there might have been an audience. As if I had to prove that I could work myself free, without injuring myself.

I struggled, but I got nowhere. That stunt man I remembered had been tied with a rope. Three hundred pounds of chain was something else.

I COULDN'T turn. I could barely shake my head. I could barely move my steel fingers. They weren't made to serve as files, but I tried to use them that way. No good. After working for hours, through the night and into the next morning, I was able to estimate my rate of progress.

At best, it would take me 768 hours to cut through four links. Over a month! By that time Herb Williams' laboratories would be ruined. If I worked any faster, the heat of friction would burn up my fingers and very probably set the barn on fire.

This was the most deserted hiding place you could ever imagine.

Through the hay I looked out of the open door of the barn loft toward a little feed lot to the north, and on to a curving country highway and distant hills.

For the next three days I lay there, a prisoner, languishing in chains. Twice a day I tried with my recorded voices to attract the attention of the farm hand

who came to feed a few cattle. The sounds never reached him.

I buzzed with my own untrained voice box. I buzzed as tirelessly as a locust. No response. That farmhand had an ear for bawling calves, but not for buzzing machinery.

"It's hopeless," I finally told myself. "It may be weeks or months before anyone else comes this way. If Moberly is thoroughly scared over what he's done, I may be left to rust my life away."

You do a lot of tall thinking at a time like that. But how useless my thoughts were when my body couldn't function.

As always, I came back to that old tantalizing question, where had my bit of brain come from? What had the fellow been like who had possessed this living part of me before his death?

He had been prankish, that I knew. He had been generally happy and gay. He liked color and noise and crowds—

It was high noon and I was looking through the musty hay toward the highway. A traveling circus came into view, its gaudy red and gold wagons blazing in the sunshine. Ten sluggish old elephants plodded along with their trunks swaying. Animal cages, a caliope, a clown wagon—

Then and there I knew! I remembered my dark past! It all flashed back in a wave of thought that was like a flame. . . . Painting my big red mouth on my white face. The red diamonds on my cheeks. The gay red and white clown suit. . . . The night I saved the little girl from the fall and met my own sudden death. . . .

A circus clown—that's what I had been.

The traveling circus passed out of sight, and my memories dimmed. I was a machine, now.

Even the chemical-nurtured brain of a mechanical man must sleep some-

times. These fires of thought had tired me. Although my voice box went right on buzzing at full volume, and my automatic fingers went right on filing at the chains, my thoughts at last blacked out and I went to sleep.

CHAPTER XI

Familiar Voices

WHEN I woke up—I have no idea how many hours or days later—familiar voices were falling on my ears.

I was instantly on the alert. Yes, hearing my old friends Madge and Herb. A radio was playing very softly, so I knew that they were in a car. They had driven up and parked just below my hayloft.

By mere chance? Hardly. I didn't guess at first how they had found their way here. Somehow I thought they had come to look for me. I tried to croak a loud buzz to them.

I couldn't buzz! My voice box had played out.

I listened.

Right away I gathered from their conversation that there had been strange developments since my disappearance. An investigation was going on, and some of the star witnesses were missing.

Poor Waldemar, the victim of some mysterious outrage by a fake mechanical man, had been buried.

But the courts wouldn't believe that the fake was not Yours Truly, the one and only Buzz-Bolt.

Herb's testimony should have been good, but since his injury he had been out of his head a part of the time, and the court was reluctant to believe him. They were also turning a deaf ear to Madge's testimony. At first I couldn't understand why. Then—

"If you hadn't admitted you were in

love with me," Herb said softly, "they would have listened. But now they believe you're prejudiced."

"I had to tell them the truth," Madge said quietly.

"It was the nicest thing I ever heard anyone say in court," said Herb, and now he made her say it again. For a little while there was silence, and I wouldn't have interrupted it for anything.

Piecing together what I had overheard, including some remarks about Joe Moberly, I understood that they had come here hoping to find him, not me.

They didn't know they were looking for a murderer. They only knew that Moberly had been in the office on a certain morning when I had failed to work. Madge thought he might testify. She had not found him at his address, but had gone to great effort to dig up some old addresses. Somewhere, she learned that he had once been interested in this piece of farm property. Herb, just out of the hospital, had agreed to ride out with her, just on a long hunch. So here they were, parked below my hayloft window, talking the whole thing over. And here I was, containing all the answers, yet unable to rattle my chains.

My buzz wouldn't work, my recorded voices were too weak to carry.

What was I to do?

Once I had over-heated Blackridge's coffee by sending electrical heat to my fingertips. I looked at the dry hay that surrounded me. I started the heat down through my trapped arm, full blast, and waited.

They turned the radio higher to listen to the part of the news that concerned them.

"Here it comes," said Herb.

THE radio announcer droned: "Sensational developments in the inves-

tigation of the robot murder case today. Herbert Williams, co-inventor, testified that the metal monster with the bloody fist is not his invention, but a cheap imitation. Miss Madge LaGrange supported this opinion. The court is weighing their words against other factors. It is well known that the Williams brothers laboratories looked to a fortune from the mass production of these Buzz-Bolts. That vision will collapse like a punctured balloon if Mr. Buzz-Bolt is a creature that turns on his own friends in the dead of night and murders them. A call has been issued for a certain Mr. Joe Moberly, whose testimony may be valuable. Meanwhile, the decision apparently hinges upon Mr. V. V. Blackridge, who will testify tomorrow. Mr. Blackridge is the real estate man for whom the mechanical monster worked, and it is believed that Mr. Blackridge and Buzz-Bolt were never on highly congenial terms . . ."

Herb snorted, "As if Uncle was ever on congenial terms with anyone! Let's get back to town."

They started the motor.

The wisps of hay at my fingertips grew red and began to curl up and begin to smoke.

The car was leaving. Its headlights cut a path along the lane beyond the fence. If they had looked back, then, they would have seen a small blaze in my barn loft.

The hay was dry. The flames leaped up around me. If they would only look back now! I disregarded the heat. My eager eyes followed that pair of headlights. They had reached the highway, there they were hesitating. Now my heart, so to speak, leaped like fire. They had seen! They were debating whether to come back. I'll bet they were mystified, all right. What had they done that could have started a fire in a deserted barn?

CHAPTER XII

A Fall Through Flames

IT WAS hard to see what was going fastest, the hay or the roof. But right away the floor was burning too, and along with the terrific heat I began to feel the quiver of the building.

From beyond the feed lot, the spectators watched from their cars. Ten or twelve had driven in from the highway to watch the sight and wonder what could be done.

I could see Herb, now, wearing bandages on both arms. He sat in the car, calling to Madge. She had gotten a bucket of water from the watering tank, probably without knowing what she was doing. A bucket of water was no match for these flames. She looked beautiful, standing there, bewildered and half frightened over something she couldn't understand, the high flames lighting her face.

Suddenly there was a ripping of black timbers beneath me, I was thrown to one side, my weight crushed down through fire-eaten floor, and I fell.

The clank of that fall was not loud, compared to the crackle of flames. My chains were too tight to make much noise. The sound I remember most was a scream from Madge.

"It's a person!" she cried. "Somebody's there, I saw them."

And she ran right to the burning edges, peering in at my dark form. Then suddenly she saw me clearly, and recognized me.

"Buzz-Bolt! *Buzz-Bolt!*"

The men from the other cars were quick to come to my rescue—not because they understood what they were doing, but because they wanted to help Madge—who certainly knew what she was doing.

Someone had a log chain with a hook,

and he threw it in among the falling timbers, hooked my chains and threw a hitch around the car's rear bumper.

"Haul away," he shouted, and out I came.

I was dragged out on my tin pants, so to speak, straight across the cowlot. The affair was pretty rough on my dignity at the moment, but anyway I was out. There would be plenty of time to repair and polish myself afterward.

Well, Mr. Palmer, this has turned out to be a rather long-winded application for a job, but I think I've given you a fair sample of my experiences and I have implied, quite honestly, that I do have my limitations and need the help of human beings now and then, even though I'm a pretty robust and self-sufficient robot, as robots go.

You may imagine, and you're right, that, once I was unchained and given a chance to testify in court, I was able to clear up things for Herb and Madge.

But there was one tense moment in that court room scene when I took an awful chance. My old clowning instincts got the better of me.

Was I the true Buzz-Bolt? Was this other creature with the bloody fist a fake that had been substituted for some malicious purpose?

This was the contention of both Herb and Madge. The court wondered.

MY TESTIMONY, which I would have gladly written in full on a typewriter, they refused to accept. All my recorded voices, as well as my buzz, were out of order. That fire was going to cost me some repairs.

And now a sour-faced boss by the name of Blackridge took the stand and I saw that whether we won or lost depended on his whims of this one crucial moment.

"Mr. Blackridge, will you please examine these two metal creatures and

tell us which is the one that the Williams brothers manufactured and placed in your office as your assistant?"

Blackridge gave me his darkest scowl. He turned slowly to that dead metal form whose free swinging arm had been made to commit the murder.

If he identified it as Buzz-Bolt, I realized that Herb and Madge would lose everything they dreamed of. Moreover, the murderer of Waldemar would go free.

But if he admitted that I was his servant, he might have to put up with me again. I don't think he wanted more of me. I had brought him too much trouble.

He started past me. A whim, an ornery whim, an act of spite. He was going to cut me cold.

I marched over to him so suddenly that he backed up against the wall in surprise, just as he had done once before. You should have seen his eyes pop at me. And he reached—you guessed it—right for those two pet hairs that struck up from the top of his bald head.

"Don't pull them out, Buzz-Bolt!" he yelled. "You promised me, Buzz-Bolt!"

I stopped and smiled. Then Blackridge saw the absurdity of his words, and, believe it or not, he smiled, just for one rash moment.

That did it, and nobody in court had any doubts about it.

I'm still working for Mr. Blackridge, Mr. Palmer, but gradually I'm learning to talk, and I know V. V. Blackridge doesn't like it, that's why I'm looking for a better job.

Daytimes preferred. Herb Williams lets me go out at nights, by the way, and just at present I'm hot on the trail of a murderer named Joe Moberly. Would you like to hear about it?

Well, maybe some other time.

EMERGENCY

THE squeal of tortured tires from a narrowly averted traffic accident, the leaping flames from fire on the roof of the next-door house, sudden, unexpected explosion, an inadvertent fall—and the reflective response of the emergency system of the body arises—sometimes so suddenly that the senses themselves might seem to dictate the response.

What happens in that vacuum-like second before the heart pounds and the breathing rate changes?

A) First of all there is sudden conscious recognition of emergency. This is the alarm flash which derails conscious thought and heats at the synaptic doors to the adrenal medulla. B) The flash automatically opens the doors of the synapse and passes (probably with much greater speed than ordinary nerve impulses) through sympathetic nerve channels, unlocking the ganglionic storehouses of sympathin excitator, which institutes heart and breathing rate changes, going on to the storehouse of adrenalin to loose its power into the blood-stream. C) As adrenalin strikes, the nerves of the adrenal cortex it starts the increase of cortical secretion necessary to increase blood sugar. D) As cortin and adrenalin circulate in the blood, the blood pressure is raised, by constriction of the vessels. E) The liver, with activity already heightened by the excretion of sympathin excitator (somewhat similar to adrenalin in effects, and secreted by the sympathetic nervous tissue) pours sugar into the blood in answer to the adrenal hormones when they reach its blood vessels. F) As the blood sugar rises, the pancreas

secrets its hormone to make the fuel available to the muscle and nerve cells. G) The thyroid tone increases and thyroxin secretion is raised to insure the igniting of the fuel. H) The pituitary gland is toned and stimulated to pour out the necessary hormone governors which it makes, to keep the excess factors under control. I) The toner substances of the gonads are manufactured and secreted in greater amount.

All this takes place in very short order, with cerebration in temporary abeyance. But after the reaction has been instituted, the cerebrum must differentiate between the advantages of meeting the situation and "suhduing" it, and the advantages of moving rapidly away.

Tremendous forces are thus unleashed within the body to meet emergencies? If activity in any direction is justified and forthcoming, the forces may be used up without much systemic damage. If the forces are not effectively employed, their products merely poison the system. Peristalsis stops or even reverses when the emergency mechanism is cut in Tremhling, apprehension and sensitivity become marked if the energies are not used. The cerebrum alone may accumulate enough poisons to kill several people, were it injected into their blood.

Thus is hate generated, and anxiety, anger, lust, hate and fear. Control of the degree of reaction is well worth while, for these emergency feeling states are the very soul of human destruction, and "he that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword."—*John McCabe Moore*

THE END

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JUNE ISSUE ON SALE APRIL 11th

Desert of the Damned

by Don Wilcox

It was like something out of Dante's mind—it couldn't be true. Yet it was—and here in an incredible desert was sheer hell. Yet, you met the most interesting people...!

IT WAS a stormy night, as viewed from my hotel window. I had turned off the light to get the full benefit of the electric flashes over this prairie town.

I had been watching for many minutes—in fact, had almost forgotten that I was in need of a midnight lunch. This was a pleasant enough way to spend a lonesome hour. If you've ever stopped over in Fort Scott, you'll remember the big, old-fashioned, brick hotel, no doubt elegant in its day.

I was in the southwest corner room on the top floor, with my elbows planted on the window-sill, taking in the panorama of blowing trees and wet rooftops and boiling black clouds.

I was thinking faraway thoughts, trying to visualize this historic spot as it might have been in the days of Indian trade.

My mental wanderings were interrupted when the window began to open from the top. A gust of rain blew in.

The lightning revealed a rain-drenched bare arm extending downward, gently forcing the window open.

My first impulse was to turn on the light, but instead I waited, fascinated by this singular action.

When the upper pane had been

forced down, a man, who might have been suspended by his heels from an invisible balloon alongside the hotel wall, crawled down into view. He muttered a low "All right." Then, whatever supported him let go, one leg at a time, and he came swinging into my room.

I had frozen during this extraordinary gymnastic. A parade of pink elephants wouldn't have widened my eyes or sagged my jaw or wobbled my knees more than this half-naked apparition crawling in out of the storm.

The man's "All right" echoed convincingly in my ears, however, and so the least embarrassing thing I could do was to start a conversation. I did so and almost frightened the poor fellow to death.

"If you don't mind—" I began, and his elbows jerked back as if he'd been shot.

"Whoa, McCorkle! What have I done?" he gulped.

"You've left the window open," I said. "If you don't mind, it ought to be closed. The rain's coming in."

"Wrong room," he said. "Wrong room. I'll be bumping along." And with that he started to make a nervous retreat by way of the window.



She sat on a limb of a tree watching the dying men . . .

"There's a door over here," I said. "I'll give you a light and you can bump along in comfort. Or do you travel exclusively on rooftops?"

"Oh, Granddaddy McCorkle," he said. "What a bonehead! I didn't need to come in. It was just a whimsy. I'll go—"

"Don't rush off," I said. "There's an extra chair here if you want to sit down."

I turned on the light and we faced each other. He was a sight, all right, very much in a class with pink elephants. He was a little fellow, with quick eyes and a comical Irish face. He was forty years old, perhaps; rather shaggy, extremely tanned. His fingers might have belonged to a stone mason. He wore a pair of rough, tattered trousers. That was all. There wasn't a stitch over his deep-tanned muscular back. He was barefoot.

"You must think I'm dressed a little queer," he said apologetically.

HE SAT down, half grinning in his confusion. Then he caught sight of himself in the mirror.

"Don't mind that mirror," I said. "It scared me too when I first saw myself."

He stared at himself very seriously.

"I'm lots older than I thought," he said. Then his furtive eyes were back on me and he seemed to feel guilty over his remark. "I'd better go. You'll think I'm a house-breaker or something . . . I'm not . . . I'm just an ordinary citizen . . . in extraordinary circumstances."

I took his word for it and asked no questions. It was plain that he hadn't intended letting himself in for any troublesome company; so I did my best not to seem curious.

"I was just going down for a midnight lunch," I said. "You're welcome

to stay here until the storm passes. There are some towels in the washroom. And here are some dry clothes in my suitcase. Make yourself comfortable. Shall I bring you a sandwich?"

"Sandwich . . . M-m-m." He reached in his pocket and came up with a soiled leather billfold from which he gave me a sadly worn five-dollar bill. "Could you make it a thick, juicy steak with all the trimmings—or—"

The thunder may have done it. The upper window pane gave forth a rather violent rattle, disturbing to our conversation, to say the least.

"As I was saying, two steaks, with all the trimmings," he said.

"Two? I thought you said—"

"Two complete orders, that's right."

I nodded. "Well done or rare?"

"Well done—er—"

Another rattle of the pane sounded amid low rolling thunder.

"That is," he went on, "one well done and the other rare. Plenty rare."

I glanced toward the window. I opened the lower pane and stuck my head out in the rain. Then I looked back at my companion, whose eyes were large with anticipation.

"Still raining?" he asked weakly.

"If you have any friends up there," I said, "why not bring them in and we'll make a party of it."

"If I've got any friends up there," he said evasively, "they like the rain."

He shifted his eyes and ran his nervous fingers through his unkempt brown hair. But as I left he gave me a friendly grin, and I guessed that, whoever or whatever he might be, I had begun to win his confidence.

A HALF hour later our dinners were brought up. If anyone could be more curious than I was as to why there should be three trays, it was the waiter. As soon as he was gone, my

mysterious companion came out of hiding, now looking considerably civilized, though my clothes were pretty baggy on him. He'd found an oversize shirt and some plus-fours I'd brought along for golf. With his deep tan, all he needed was a turban to pass for a Turkish prince.

"After I've sampled some food and drink," he said, "I'll feel more like talking."

"I'd better warn you, anything you say may go into print," I said. "I'm David Burton. You may have seen my name before. As a writer of stories I'm always picking up material."

"Stories! Granddaddy McCorkle! Have I got a story for you! Have I? Wait a minute."

The window was rattling again, and this time there was no thunder to account for it. My mysterious companion went over and opened it from the top. He picked up the tray that contained the rare steak, and held it out into the darkness.

A huge yellow talon reached down and took it away.

CHAPTER II

The Mysterious Gun

WE WERE chasing Rommel back across Africa when it began (said Toby McCorkle, apparently anxious to take my mind off the strange thing I had just seen—and as he proceeded with his story I almost forgot, for a time, that some weird taloned creature was up there on the roof waiting for him.)

We had reached a village near Mizda. You'll see it on the map, and you'll probably think it's pretty close to the Mediterranean coast. It isn't. It's so far inland that any time you get a whiff of sea breeze you're smelling a

mirage. Which is just about nothing.

A lot of blasted tanks and artillery pieces cluttered up the village, a sort of junk man's paradise. And there were plenty of prisoners running around trying to find some officer to attach themselves to so they could get counted in for a square meal. Mostly Italians, but a sprinkling of Germans.

Well, here was this big crusty German professor and his gun, and thereby hangs the tale. That's where I got lifted out of the war so quick I didn't know what happened.

(I interrupted my narrator. Did he mean an honorable discharge? . . . "Accidental discharge," McCorkle replied, and continued with his monologue.)

We found this big gun and the big crusty German between a couple of rock heaps that had been buildings. The German was working away, apparently lost to the world. He was clearing a space around the base of the gun, heaving broken bricks and stones right and left. We figured right away that he was crazy, working that way in the heat.

His clothes were good quality white linen, getting more soiled every minute, and he had three fountain pens in his coat pocket. Yes, he was wearing a coat and a hat, also tortoise shell spectacles on his nose, with amber sun lenses attached. Prisoners tramped by within his hearing and he didn't even turn to look. Seven or eight of us who were detailed to gather up some of the strays stopped and watched him.

When he saw us standing there a shudder of surprise caught him, but he went right on tossing rocks. By now he had cleaned off a thirty-foot square behind the base of his gun. The ground was hard packed; it had been a street before our shells upset the fruit baskets; now it was a smooth white earth

floor, and the sight of it pleased him.

"He's crazy as a Texas bedbug," said Lieutenant Wells. "What does he think he's doing?"

"They shoulda kept him in Berlin," I said. "I hear they need extra street cleaners."

One of our men yelled at him. "What you got there, cheese-puss? A rocket gun?"

The professor began to mumble to himself, not bothering to answer us. So we started shouting at him, making sport. Where'd he get that glorified beer barrel? What was he aiming at, Bengasi or Cairo? Wasn't he afraid of a traffic jam in that Holland tunnel? Why didn't he stick his head in and forget to pull it out.

"Cut it!" Lieutenant Wells snapped. "I want to catch what he's saying."

Lieutenant Gene Wells was an officer we'd all learned to respect in the course of our past half year of stringing along with the British Eighth. He was young, but hard as steel, and quick with his imagination. We fell silent; we watched and listened.

The German jumped around this way and that, like a dude heavyweight doing his shadow-boxing in Sunday clothes. He twisted a lever here, he twirled a crank there, and the gun—if gun it was—swung upward for what might have been an aim at a cloud of smoke over a burning harem or something on the north horizon. Or maybe he was getting set for that swarm of flies above a nearby fruit market.

I BENT down and tried to get a squint through the gun's barrel, the big end of which was lowered in our direction. Some of the men edged around for a front view, but Lieutenant Wells called them back.

"Look out, you rubes. He says the damned thing's going off. I think he's

loco, but we'll run him in with the prisoners to play safe."

Personally, I had a hankering to see this circus act to the finish. This thing I've called a gun looked like the cannon that shoots the man into the net twice daily at Fairyland Park, admission twenty-five cents. It glistened like chromium, innocent of all camouflage, and it responded to the professor's crank action like a big beautiful toy.

"He says to get back, it's going off," someone yelled.

Four or five English soldiers had joined us by now, and Lieutenant Wells called to one of them.

"Take a look at this, you artillery men. What do you see?"

"A bally humbug," one of them said. "Nothing but a harmless fabrication—to impress the natives, no doubt."

At an order from the lieutenant, four men closed in on the German professor and prodded him with bayonets to make his feet go in the right direction.

He went, but with the most bombastic of protests. His mad guttural squawks caused us to stare after him. He swung his arms, pointing back at the gun, vociferating like a volley of ack-ack.

"What the hell's he raving about?" one of the bayonet men asked.

"He says he's a civilian engaged in a peaceful scientific experiment," said Lieutenant Wells. "Let him tell it to the colonel."

One of the four who were leading him away must have known enough German to scramble the professor's explosive warnings. The interpretation was shouted back to us:

"Did you hear that? He says that damned gun jumps sideways when it goes off. So don't get in front of it—or somethin'."

Seven or eight of us were standing directly back of the blinkety-blank

humbug. It went off—not frontwards, not sidewise, but *backward!*

It gave one mighty puff. If you can imagine the exhaust pipe of my old coal-burning Willys-Knight magnified a hundred times, that was it.

The puff looked like red steam. It felt like fire. And, believe me, friend, it got us, just like that!

CHAPTER III

Land of Beauty—and Death

IF YOU ever happened to be standing over a volcano when the lid blew off you can imagine my feelings when this gun went *poof*. Though I've never tried the volcano myself, I assume there would be an instant's sensation of heat, then you're gone. That's how it was.

And that was my exit from the war. I presume the whole group of us have been listed as missing in action.

So what happened to me? Something no man in the world could ever guess. Something that has still got me guessing, and I'll be an Irish uncle to anyone who can help me figure it out.

First there was that long period of awful blackness, like when you're down with the measles and a high fever in a dark room and you think you'll never live to see daylight.

I was undoubtedly unconscious for a long time. Sometimes I thought I could hear someone calling, "Hey, McCorkle—hey, Pudding-Puss!" Then I'd go off into a dream in which I'd talk with Private Hammerstein—Maxie for short—because he's the one who always called me Pudding Puss.

Then I'd seem to hear Lieutenant Wells shouting, "Where's Private McCorkle? Has anyone seen Private McCorkle?" But these dreams couldn't make sense, because everything was so black and I just couldn't wake up.

The heat was terrific, during all this dark torture, and sometimes I thought sand was blowing over me, and I was dying of thirst.

But finally it rained, and my parched lips tasted the sweetest drink of water in all my life. It rained torrents, and along with the beat of raindrops I heard a terrific fluttering of wings, like a thousand condors flying past me. My eyes opened.

I beheld what I thought must be the strangest landscape in all Africa. Great Granddaddy McCorkle! Where was I?

I was in the middle of a thick clump of bushes on the side of a steep, cone-shaped little mountain peak. Night's darkness was trying to make way for daylight, but the rain came down in heavy gray curtains. I started to climb out of the bushes, but I was as weak as a sick kitten. I dropped back and tried to make myself comfortable.

Through the brush I could see these big feathered creatures swooping down past me—Zwish . . . Zwish . . . Zwish . . . Birds? I supposed so, although it wasn't light enough to see them plainly. Or angels? I confess I wondered. But how could such a reckless one as Toby McCorkle expect to see angels?

The landscape was an artist's dream—a wide floor of land broken here and there by these conical little mountain peaks as fanciful as cathedral spires. As the rain clouds began to fall away these geological specimens took on a host of colors—purples, blues, greens, deep reds. No painted desert on earth could match this.

I smeared my wet face with my handkerchief and blinked my eyes and tried to catch my breath. There were such fresh, sweet smells in the air breezing around this mountain that I felt sure I had somehow fallen into a brand new world.

When the morning sun broke through, presently, I almost swooned from sheer delight. The thousands of bright tints in clouds, mountains, and desert plains were so wonderful as to make your favorite scenery artist look pretty shoddy in comparison.

To climax this gorgeous riot of color, there were those thousand or so bird-like creatures flying around in formation on wings that glistened in all of your favorite hues.

Now I've never been accused of being an artist or even a second cousin to one. The nearest I ever came to getting mixed up with art was when I hired out as an attendant for the Art Galleries. For three years I paced the floor of a certain northwest corner room where the walls were splashed with modernistic works that had driven two attendants insane, and they didn't affect me in the least. The management figured that I was calloused.

Maybe so. But there was something within the soul of Toby McCorkle that felt a wild and rapturous thrill in the presence of all this sunlit splendor.

I'D BETTER warn you right now that I'm building you up for an awful let-down. There was something pretty ugly going on right in the middle of this beautiful world. It was a few minutes before I realized it.

The thousand or so bird creatures flew low over the level floor of sand beneath my mountainside. They followed one another in a circular formation that appeared to be a quarter of a mile in diameter. Outside their winged circle were these five cathedral spires of colored rock—six, counting this one upon which I had evidently fallen—casting their jagged blue shadows over the sand.

These six mountain peaks formed a sort of hexagon around the winged crea-

tures' playground, and right away I guessed that some sort of ceremony was going on.

The flying circle changed to a cloverleaf. All but four or five pairs of wings kept in motion. These chosen few, who had led the procession, settled down on their feet right in the center of the cloverleaf where some dark object lay.

Gradually the shadows shifted and I saw that these four were feasting on something. It was a gruesome reminder of the way the turkey buzzards used to gather around the luckless lamb or barnyard fowl that fell by the wayside.

However, I thrust this thought aside. From what I had seen of these winged specimens they bore a certain resemblance to human beings.

You see, it was such a beautiful world that I wanted to think well of it. Moreover, I was already building high hopes that I would find some degree of civilization beyond these desert playgrounds. That I would find some travel bureau to tell me how I got here. And how I could get back. And what had happened to Lieutenant Wells and Private Hammerstein and Private Biddle and the others who had been caught by that backfiring toy gun.

An hour later the bird creatures were gone, and I descended the steep tooth of rock and walked out over the level sand. The scanty remains of the feast lay in my path. My eyes widened with horror.

I would have known Private Biddle's khaki cap anywhere. Two burnt spots and the initials B. B. in soiled yellow thread.

Most of his clothing had been cut to shreds, and I could see the marks of sharp talons all around.

I saw all too plainly that Private Biddle's back had been broken in two places. Under the conditions it gave

me a little comfort to know that he must have died when he fell to this land—rather than having to suffer death at the talons of these monstrous winged beasts.

For all that remained of Private Biddle now was his clean white skeleton.

CHAPTER IV

Yellow Talons

SOME of the bird creatures were coming back. A line of them circled like contented giant pigeons around a pinnacle against the sun. I paced rapidly across the sand, tried to force my weak legs to run. The nearest hiding place would have to do.

My khaki cap fell when I staggered up the base of the mountain. I looked back, and had an instant's illusion of seeing myself lying beside that cap, just as Private Biddle lay beside his. I hurried on.

Apparently I was not being pursued. Most of the line of bird creatures floated away.

Soon I was back in my old hiding place—the nearest thing to home in this strange land, with the same brambles tickling my left ear and the same clump of roots punching me in the ribs. I wondered how many days I had lain there unconscious.

Apparently I had fallen there from—well, from the mysterious nowhere that the gunshot sent me through. It seemed that I had suffered no broken bones or serious bruises, so it must have been the original shock that had laid me out.

After what I had seen of Private Biddle I hardly dared wonder what had happened to the rest of the group that had got caught. It was up to me to look out for myself, and so—

Oh-oh! One of those pesky bird crea-

tures must have seen me. He and seven others had alighted out there in the middle of the feasting ground. Now he started, with a flutter and a few hops, in my general direction.

He turned to the others and motioned them to follow, and called something to them in a voice that sounded very human. I say *he*, for his face appeared to be somewhat whiskered, and he lacked the long flowing hair that had identified the females of the feasting ceremony.

Two others followed him for a few hesitant hops, and kept looking my way, though I doubt if they could see me.

The bold one took to his wings and came on as fast and straight as a baseball. He had spotted my thicket with deadly accuracy.

From somewhere back of me I heard a clatter of loose rocks, and I figured some more of them must be closing in from the rear.

But I didn't dare turn. This big fellow was swooping right down at me. For the first time I saw what huge, dangerous yellow talons he carried. And what a perfect human face—with what an inhuman look!

Bejabers, I was in no physical condition for a fight. I had no weapons and I had no strength. But my name is McCorkle, and my granddaddy's name was McCorkle. I jumped up out of the thicket with my fists swinging.

Again I heard that rustle of rocks back of me. But it didn't have the ominous sound of these wings right over my head. The big human bird fluttered his massive gray wings, hovered right above me. His deadly talons lowered—two feet beyond my fists—one foot.

I CAN see him yet, glaring down at me. Wild but fearless black eyes, a murderous taunt on his gory lips, a fringe of heavy brown whiskers over

his leathery cheeks and throat, and muscular arms that clawed at the air—not with hands but with scaled yellow talons. What a sinister, weirdly shaped creature he was, as brown and naked as a panther.

If he had had legs—even short ones like mine—I would have seized his ankles and taken my chances on dragging him down. He had no ankles, luckily for me. His human body terminated at the hips.

But there was a fan of tail feathers. I snatched at them and—missed! Then he dipped down and swung a talon at me. Just one yellow flash, fast like a tracer bullet. I ducked. I double ducked—down, right, left—but I knew he had me, and I knew he meant to clean my bones.

I fell to my knees. I grabbed a bit of shrub, and, praise be to St. Patrick, it came up by the roots. I flung the thing at his face, and trusted to luck that the spray of dirt and mud wouldn't agree with his eyes.

"Yeou-eeek!" he yelled. "Yeou-eeek!"

He flapped his wings, took a swift circle around me, and called down to his group of friends on the feasting ground.

"Yeou-eeek!" It wasn't a cry of pain, as I had at first thought, but the cry of a winged killer, boasting to his friends that he was now ready to claim his victim.

They heard that boast, and took to their wings. They were coming over to see me get the works—I knew it as sure as I knew my grandfather's name was—here it came—that yellow talon—

But it didn't hit. That rustle of stones a few yards up the mountain brought forth a sharp *crack!*

I heard the bullet whiz past. I saw feathers fly from my assailant's left wing tip—just *pfft*—and they fluttered

down, zigzag, into the bushes.

The owner of the clipped wing gave an angry choking sound. "A-a-awk!" He flapped past me so quick he knocked me off balance. I whirled as I fell, and caught sight of Lieutenant Wells, pistol in hand, crouched in the rocks fifteen yards away.

"Saint Patrick, be good!" I mumbled. "Don't let the next one miss!"

I was sure that insignificant wing clip had done no damage. But I was wrong. With another, "A-a-awk!" the violent bird creature turned and flew off!

I didn't understand. What on earth happened to his fighting spirit? He didn't even look to see who shot him. He just turned and went. He headed right around the mountainside as hard as he could go, as if he'd been insulted.

"You practically missed him," I hollored to Lieutenant Wells.

"Amazing results for a miss," Wells said, coming over to me. "What do you suppose—Look!"

My recent attacker plunged down into a thicket and started running with his wings folded, trying to keep out of sight of the other bird creatures. But they flew over and searched him out—and then you should have heard the weird shouting.

"Blaw! Blaw! Blaw!" they mocked. "Wooveley-wooveley-blaw!"

ONE of them grabbed his clipped wing and spread it out. From our distance we could never tell that the tip feathers were missing. But obviously that was what the commotion was all about. They followed him around the rocky mountain ledge, not doing him any bodily harm, but giving him enough vocal mockery to weigh him down for days to come.

That was my first lesson in how wing-

men behave, and it did me good to know that it was more important to them to chastise one of their own members who got his wingtips in trouble than it was to come back and murder us.

Lieutenant Gene Wells snapped his fingers, and I broke out of my daze and followed him. He seemed very eager to make some tracks in another direction, and this particular McCorkle at his heels was of the same opinion.

CHAPTER V

Time, Space, and a Female

YOU probably don't know what heat is. I mean, you've never really experienced hot weather. Maybe you've worked on slightly warm pavement when the sun's doing a hundred and twenty in the shade, and you've complained about having to pour boiling tar. Merely tepid, my friend.

Or possibly you've spent a winter's evening at a railway station in a tiny two-by-four waiting room with fifty people and no ventilation, and the station agent fires the stove up to red hot, and every time he looks out at the snow he tosses in another bucket of coal. And your head grows clammy and your woolen underwear begins to itch. That was a refrigerator, my friend, compared to the heat that bore down on us in this strange land.

"Where are we going?" I asked Wells.

"To try to find the others."

"Is it far?"

"Depends on whether they've kept in motion since I last saw them. They saw what happened to Private Biddle and Charrington—"

"Charrington! Did he get it too?" I groaned.

"Eight bird monsters pounced on him when we first got here."

Gradually I pieced together Lieutenant Wells' story. Wherever we were, we had all made our appearance on this hillside at about the same time. The fall—if you could call it a fall—had left most of the gang uninjured, but jolted.

"Like tumbling from a second story window," Wells said. "But as we picked ourselves up, one by one, we all looked pretty silly. There was nothing overhead to drop from—not even a low cloud. Nothing but those big harmless looking birds floating high overhead on lazy wings."

Hours had been spent looking for me, in vain. Maxie Hammerstein had kept yelping that they'd better get back to their company. But no one knew which way to go.

No one even knew which way the war was. But if this land of sand was a stretch of the Sahara desert, it seemed best to trek northward. The Mediterranean must be up there somewhere.

"It was obvious," said Wells, as he recounted these things, "that some very unusual power from the professor's gun had shot us through a space of dozens of miles—if not hundreds. All of our previous surroundings were simply gone. Didn't you observe this?"

"At a glance," I said.

"But Private Charrington couldn't get it through his head. He was sure that our village must be right on the other side of one of these mountains."

"It was miles from any mountain."

"Charrington couldn't be convinced. While some of us were searching you, he struck off down the slope and walked out on the flat. That's when it happened."

I studied Wells' expression, the tight line of his mouth, his cool and courageous eyes. He and Charrington had been close friends. Young fellows in their twenties, they had been just smart

enough to keep a forty-year-old like me guessing. I had been on many a late night vigil with them, scouting the enemy moves across Algiers. I had heard them argue about the paths of the stars, the geological changes of the earth, and a lot of dizzy ideas about time and space and Einstein, and whether or not there were any native earthworms under the sands of the Sahara.

"Charrington couldn't have known that walking out on the floor of sand was an invitation to death," Wells said. "None of us could know it until he tried it. But it's the same lesson this desert fighting has driven home. A soldier can hide in the shadowed mountainsides, but he turns himself into a target the minute he walks out on the smooth desert floor. Eight of these winged beasts swooped down. It happened before anyone could draw a gun. Now we understand what we're up against."

LATER Gene Wells gave me the fuller story. The winged men had made a ceremonial feast of Charrington the same as the recent one around Biddle. Two thousand of them, Wells estimated, flew the circles and spirals and cloverleaf formations, while the four big shots took over the body and had their bestial orgy of feasting.

After that the rest of the men slipped from one hiding place to another under Lieutenant Wells' strict orders.

Meanwhile neither Biddle nor I had been found. Wells set the course for the party. But they hadn't got far when he left them to go back and look for Biddle and me.

"The winged men found Biddle before I got back. He may have been dead already," said Wells.

I reassured him on this point from my discovery of the broken vertebrae.

"Then we did fall—we must have—

but from where?"

Wells' question was not to be answered that day, nor that week or month.

But he and I made the most of the night's darkness to put miles of space between us and the desert hexagon. We hiked as if we had a sure destination somewhere to the north. What utter innocence!

We kept our eyes on the stars, and the goal toward which we moved was something like a star. It stayed just as far away—no matter how many hours we walked.

You don't understand how this could be? My good friend Wells and I didn't either, on that starry night. But it was true, as we would someday learn.

Through ten hours of darkness we walked, leaving the cathedral rocks and wingmen's playgrounds farther behind with every step—and yet, if the facts were known, *we were not one foot nearer to the scenes of war that had so mysteriously vanished. Nor one foot farther away.*

Curiously enough, we spent part of that long dark hike talking about such mysteries as space and time and Mr. Einstein and the stars and why the past and the future never happen to bump into each other.

That is, Wells did most of the talking, and I threw in a few *uh-huhs* and a goodly number of *huh's* and *you-don't-say's* while I tried to straighten out all the mysterious meanings. This time and space business isn't something to be taken in one easy dose, like your castor oil. It's more like your vitamin pills and your setting up exercises—a little every day, and after a long time you really feel the results.

There was a female bird creature flying over our heads when the pink dawn came in over the land.

She was flying low—not more than

fifty feet up. Wells drew his pistol. I believe he'd have shot her if she hadn't been so swift. Swish—She was away like a rocket. Wells shook his head.

"We've got to make tracks now," he whispered. "She must have seen us. She'll be back with a mob of brothers and sisters, or I miss my guess."

The nearest peak sticking up through the level floor of sand was about a mile away, and we skipped for it, keeping a sharp lookout for trouble.

HIDDEN again, we took turns sleeping and standing guard. Twice before noon we saw this lone flyer swing down out of the cloud level and circle the base of a neighboring mountain. Once she came close enough that we could see her dark hair fluttering over her naked brown shoulders. Her face was the face of a beautiful savage human animal. Her wings might have been made out of those ten dollar blossoms that society women wear at parties.

She didn't see us—at least she pretended she didn't. Apparently she was just circling the base of the butte looking for rodents.

"You're not going to shoot her, are you, Lieutenant?"

He didn't answer me. He had drawn his pistol, but was sort of gasping for breath at that moment. Like a fellow might if a beautiful leopard leaped out into the sunlight unexpectedly. The sight of such a girl cutting through the air so gracefully was enough to hypnotize anyone.

Then she was winging away from us, and I could feel just the faintest stir of air against my sweaty cheeks from the slow, rhythmic flapping of her wings.

I said to Wells, "You decided not to

shoot, huh?"

"Yeh." He was still watching.

"Better save the bullets, huh?"

"Yeh." He wasn't hearing me. But he had told me before that his orders to the other men were to save their bullets. There were too many of these creatures to start a battle. We wouldn't last an hour. Our one bet was to keep hidden.

Wells, gazing, returned his pistol to its holster.

"I know what you're thinking," I said.

He turned on me with a show of temper that was entirely uncalled for. "Mind your manners."

"You're thinking," I said, "what a swell specimen she'd be to take back to the museum."

Wells' eyes warmed with a restrained twinkle. "Why not the zoo?"

"After what's happened," I said, "I didn't figure that you'd care to let any of these creatures live—in cages or out."

His mouth tightened, and he gave me nothing but silence the rest of the day.

We rested, ate lightly, and sipped water from our canteens. Within another day we would have to replenish our supplies. If only a plane would have come over—but here, in my ignorance, I was hoping for the impossible.

Another night of hiking. Another dawn—this time with the hope that we had left the land of the winged humans far behind. But this was being too optimistic. The swiftness of wings gave them dominion over a wide area.

Then, too, as Wells observed, the abundance of sand squirrels and other scampering little rodents marked this stretch of desert as a sure hunting ground for larger flesh-eating animals.

We didn't overtake the rest of our party. In fact, in these two nights we had failed to pick up their trail, and

we began to wonder if we might have passed them.

But we did pick up a trail of sorts, with implications that gave us a headache. One man's trail, with one identifying mark.

TO GIVE you a bird's-eye of the geography, this big level area of sand might have been mapped in the shape of an oak leaf. All the little curlicues and scallops cutting in around the sides would be these tooth-shaped mountains forming the border around the desert floor.

Through the nights we had been cutting straight across the level stretches. But whenever we needed cover we had headed for the left side of the oak leaf pattern. In other words, our north-bound trail had threaded in and out of the mountains along the west side of the flat desert.

This daylight found us heading for an almost bald tower of green and gray rock with a bit of scrubby woods near the base.

"Watch everything," Wells muttered. "The way this land lies, the other men would be sure to hit this point—if they've come along this side of the flat."

"If I were a winged man, and hungry," I said, "I'd figure that here is a perfect trap for soldier steak and tenderloins."

"Watch everything," Wells repeated. "There could be a hundred pairs of wings in those thickets. But with daylight on us we've got to take our chance on finding some cover."

We turned around, then, to catch sight of the pair of fluttering orchid wings speeding through the air within twenty yards of us. That same abbreviated human figure—the female whose savage beauty had fairly petrified us the day before.

"The museum specimen!" I exclaimed.

"Zoo!" said Wells. And this time he didn't draw a gun. He just gazed.

"I know what you're thinking," I said.

"What?"

"She needs more feathers. She's got no modesty, flying around in public this way—"

"Shut up," said Wells. "You're all wet."

He seemed a bit ruffled so I tried to smooth it over. "What I mean is, she needs some hands instead of those talons. And she needs some legs."

"She needs nothing," said Wells very dogmatically, as if he were an army doctor offering a diagnosis. "She's doing all right, isn't she? This is her land, not ours. She's got exactly what she needs to take her up and down these mountains, hasn't she? She'd have a devil of a time getting along with her people if she had hands and legs. Now, wouldn't she?"

"Hell, I didn't mean to insult her," I said.

"All right."

"Say, where'd you get these notions?" I said. "Next thing I know you'll be trying to strike up a conversation—"

"Don't be silly."

"Well, the way you're standing there gazing—hell, maybe she's gone after a hungry mob. You *know* she saw us this time."

Gene Wells broke out of his freeze. "We'd better streak for the tall timber."

We streaked, and on the way we stopped like stones, to find ourselves looking down at big foot tracks in the sand.

Those tracks were going our way, so we followed them. And ten minutes later, just as we were nearing the edge of the thickets we saw something lying

beside the foot tracks that was bright green.

It was a *fountain pen*. Wells picked it up and turned it over in his hand.

"The last green fountain pen I remember seeing," he said, "was in the coat pocket of the German professor."

CHAPTER VI

Canteens and Angels

"**G**REAT-great-granddaddy McCorkle," I said. "What's a fountain pen doing here in the middle of the desert?"

Wells pointed to the tracks. "Whoever came this way was staggering, from exhaustion or thirst or both. He may have been near the end of his rope. What do you see here, McCorkle?"

"Looks like he fell," I said.

Wells nodded. "That's when the pen dropped. But he got to his feet again. If he found any water around here he may have pushed on. But on the other hand—"

"He may be sitting up there in the bushes watching us," I said.

It gave me a creepy feeling. We seemed to be coasting into an invisible traffic jam. But Wells was ready to take his chances that any man in this parched land would be a friend. Even if it were the German professor.

"The last I saw of the professor," I said, "he was being led away by four men with bayonets."

"That was just before the gun exploded," said Wells. "But he broke free just as that puff of red smoke popped out. He was running back to us when the damned thing caught us."

I gazed at the tracks again, and in spite of myself I felt a certain respect and awe toward the big, blustering, bespectacled professor. Whether his intentions had been evil or good, it was

evident that he had applied his ingenious brain to an amazing line of secret knowledge.

I said to Wells, "That guy **knew** we were going places."

"Sure he did," said Wells.

"And he wanted to go along."

"Wanted to—and did. But after he got here he didn't show his face to us. He must have made his exit from the winged creatures in a hurry."

"And left us to their mercy," I said. "What's his big idea?"

"I don't think he cared about us," said Wells. "We were just so much surplus baggage. He meant to shoot that gun before anybody came. He was probably in the last five minutes of a long experiment when we found him—maybe the culmination of a lifetime of study. If so, no wonder he carried on like a madman when we came along and started razzing him."

We followed the faltering steps for another thirty feet. They swung in a dizzy zig-zag path, first away from, and then toward the nearest patch of bushes.

I stopped and blinked my eyes and snapped my fingers. A true McCorkle inspiration had hit me.

"If he knew how to get us here, Wells," I said, "praise be to Saint Patrick, he'll know how to get us back."

LIEUTENANT Wells nodded with a slight smile at the corners of his eyes and I saw that he was 'way ahead of me. "That's the point exactly, McCorkle. We've got to find him. We're going to find him."

"We're going to—" I started to repeat. "Oh-oh. There's a part of him."

I bent down and picked up his tortoise shell spectacles. That was all—just his specs at the end of his trail. For at this point *his foot tracks ran out*.

What went on here?

We stood there for about five minutes, looking and wondering. The early forenoon sun was already growing uncomfortably hot. Our twelve-foot shadows pointed toward the base of this tall towering spike of gray and green rock toward which we and the mysterious tracks had advanced. Its sides stood up from the desert floor like the walls of an iceberg out of a level sea. The scrubby bushes and brambles were fairly thick upon the first hundred feet of its elevation. Farther up they were thinly sprinkled, so that the upper two hundred feet appeared as a bald rocky dome.

"Don't sunburn your tonsils," I said to Wells. "Do you think he jumped up there?"

"He went somewhere," Wells muttered.

But it was obvious he couldn't have jumped anywhere. When a man, tramping the desert, falls for a second time, and there his trail ends completely, with no tracks of any other men or animals for yards around, there's only one way he could have gone. *Up*.

Something with wings had come down and taken him up.

"This spells another feast over at the hexagon," I said. "Tough chewing, I'll bet. Plenty salty, too."

Wells took the spectacles, tapped them with his finger. The sand that the perspiration-coated frames had gathered fell away. This, like the condition of the foot tracks, argued that a few hours had passed since the German brought these tracks to a dead end.

We backtracked for a hundred yards or more along this mysterious track, thinking that we might find an answer. Maybe this track-maker had thought we were on his trail and had contrived to give us this dead end to throw us off the scent.

Looking back, we could see the dim

imprints of his steps fading away over the gently rolling surfaces of yellow sand to the south, and nearer at hand our own converging with them.

"I'll feel safer," I muttered, "when the wind fills those footprints in. Hell, any winged mob with any sense could run us down with no trouble at all."

Wells gave a fatalistic nod. But he wasn't in a mood to say much. He was deep in thought—maybe about that winged girl, though I hoped not. I hoped he was figuring out what we could say to the German professor to make him take us out of this desert.

A fountain pen and a pair of specs weren't much to go on, but Wells made up his mind we were going to scour this chunk of mountain for more tracks.

"If the birds picked him up," said Wells, "there's still a chance that he fought free. We'll rest first, then look around."

We spiralled up the sloping base of the gray-green tower of rock and found some welcome shade. It was a few degrees less torrid, buried among the fleshy-leaved vegetation. We shook the sand out of our shoes, took a few swallows of water from our canteens, and went to sleep.

I WAS dead to the world, and later in the day when I half awakened to Wells' whisper, "I'll be back later, Mac. Snore on," I took him at his word and fell back to sawing logs.

When I shook out of it, late in the afternoon, Wells was still gone, but I knew he had been back because my canteen had been filled.

This was good news. Between the cool drink and the refreshing rest I was ready for another go at the desert. Incidentally, I would remember this gray-green peak as a source of water if we ever came back this way.

About an hour before sundown Wells

jogged back. He looked worn and pale, and I tried to get him to sleep before we started on.

"We've got to get across to the other range," he said.

"Think they're ahead of us yet?"

"I'm afraid they're having tough sledding," said Wells. "I sighted several flocks of wingmen flying along that row of peaks. I climbed almost to the top of this tower for a look—"

He broke off with his heavy mood as he picked up the canteen he had left hanging in the bushes. I was a bit mystified by the pleased squint he gave me, as if he'd forgotten filling the two canteens while I slept.

"Good," he said. "We'll push on."

Trudging out over the flat sand in the sunset we kept a constant lookout for danger. That particular female with the orchid wings hadn't forgotten us. Wells kept looking back at the green-gray peak, and I knew he was seeing that little speck that kept circling the pinnacle. He didn't say anything, though. So I got more and more suspicious. She must have been there all afternoon while I slept.

Twilight came on and we couldn't see anything but the fantastic mountains silhouetted black against the blue sky, and the stars popping out all around. We caught our direction for the night's hike and kept making tracks—tracks we hoped the sand would fill before daybreak.

"When I woke up this afternoon and didn't see you around," I said, "I figured you'd picked up the German professor's trail."

"No such luck," said Wells.

"Not even a track?"

"I clambered all the way around that green tooth. Sand on all sides. But not a track."

"Then the wingmen put his tracks to an end," I said. "They'll do the same

for us whenever they get ready. Maxie and the gang may look out on the desert tomorrow morning and see us coming. And it would be like Maxie to come out to meet us with a couple canteens of water. And what'll he find? Not us. Just our tracks coming to a stop. The two little men that weren't there."

"You're a pessimist," said Wells. "Hasn't our luck been good enough for you the last forty-eight hours?"

"I think," I said, "that that female with the orchid wings is a spy for the others. I'll bet she was watching every move you made this afternoon."

"I didn't see her once," said Wells.

"I'll bet she knew you were looking for the owner of the fountain pen and specs . . . I'll bet she watched you fill the canteens."

"Huh?" Wells' voice was edged with annoyance. "You must be dizzy with the heat. I didn't fill the canteens. *You* did it."

"The hell I did," I said. "That cool drink was waiting for me when I woke up. I figured you had—"

"I hiked all around that peak but I never did see a spring. Lay off your joking, McCorkle, and tell me where it was. We might need it again. Springs are too few and far between—"

"Like angels' visits, huh?" I said.

"Okay, it *was* an angel's visit—an angel with talons."

CHAPTER VII

Wells Falls

WELLS chose to ignore my sarcasm. He was as delighted as a schoolboy with a good report card.

"She's for us, McCorkle!" he said. "This proves it. She's watching over us."

I came back at him with some unkind mockery. Sure, she'd filled the

canteens. She was watching over us, all right. Just like the farmer's daughter watches over the turkeys before Thanksgiving.

"It don't pay to let prize turkeys go thirsty," I said.

That nettled him, and so we had another round. It grieved me to see how his attitude of trust in that winged girl was growing. I couldn't get to the bottom of it. After what had happened to two of our men—after what seemed to have happened to the German professor—he was nevertheless feeling halfway charitable toward this dangerous female spy. It made me shudder.

Daylight found us still trudging eastward.

Soon the sun was rising, hot and fierce, as if to set the sands on fire. Wells had gone too long without sleep. It was beginning to tell on him. Seasoned though we were to desert heat, there was plenty of punishment in store for us for today.

Or would it take more than a day to get across? If so, hunger and thirst would catch up with us.

By the following afternoon we were still going, but I knew we were about done. The sun was cooking us alive. Fatigue had caught up with Wells at last. He was sick. He tried to deny it, but I knew.

I knew, too, that he had let me drink more than my share of water. The canteens were empty now.

We'd been fooled by those damned mountains. We'd thought they were closer. Maybe the bright colors had done it, or the atmosphere. If we could have had a map—but who would ever map this godforsaken land?

Well, the German professor might have. No telling what he had been up to. But the desert had got him by now, we thought. And it would get us.

Wells' strength gave out all at once. He fell on the bare sand. I could have wept.

He fell, and there, not two hundred feet away was that gruesome orchid-winged girl, sitting on the branch of a gnarled old petrified tree. She was watching us. She saw Wells fall. She was looking at us with eyes that were hungry.

I dropped down beside Wells and started to lift him. I hesitated. That winged girl's savage face, her whole aspect of eagerness, caused my nerves to go brittle.

"We don't dare stop here, Wells," I said.

"Got to rest, Mac," he said weakly. "You go on. I'll catch up."

"You know you'd never make it alone . . . Up on your knees, man . . . There, get an arm over my shoulder."

"Too heavy, Mac. Let me rest . . . When the sun gets down . . ."

"You're comin' on," I growled. "Lean on me . . . Now."

I walked him along for about an hour, and we made less than a mile. He was right. I couldn't take it. We fell down time and again, and each time I helped him to his feet we both had less strength to go on. But go on we did.

I tried to keep him quiet, but he kept talking out of a fever.

"Which way are we going?" he said. "You're taking me the wrong way, Mac. There's the mountains that way. They're coming closer. They're all red. Like blood. Where are the men, Mac? I don't see the men . . . Oh, there they are. They're coming to us. Wading in blood. Thank God, they're alive."

"You're clean outa your head," I snarled. "There's nothing that way but damned sunshine and sand. We're going right. Leave that to me. Close your glassy eyes, damn it, before you go

blind . . . Come on, now! Take it easy."

IT WAS awful. I couldn't do much but keep fighting along, a foot at a time, and finally it seemed only inches. Our lips swelled until we quit our senseless talking. But I couldn't stop thinking—thinking how Wells had helped me—on two different occasions—when we'd lost ourselves among the Germans and Italians that time long ago in Algiers.

He'd done it for me just like this—twice, and gladly. And both times I'd thought, what the hell use was it to drag a corpse like me around? Now it was my turn. Any one of his men would have done the same for him. With the possible exception of Franz Cobert, the half French sergeant. Somehow I always doubted whether Franz Cobert had any red loyalty in his guts. But the other men would have died for a guy like Wells.

"Going right?" Wells would murmur every few minutes.

"Sure," I said. Then I would look back to see if that damned pair of bright wings was following. No, she was still there in the trees, more than a mile behind us now; but in this open vista of sand she stood out as plain as a moon in a sky.

Wells would try to look back. He must have known she was there. But he didn't mention it. And I thought to myself, "The poor sap. He started on this stretch betting on her help. He bet on the wrong angel. She's back there counting the minutes until feast time."

We stopped only when the sun's tortures were on the wane for the day. Wells was quiet. We both lay there resting, flat on our backs, waiting for the dark.

After a brief feverish sleep he awoke

with his eyes toward the eastern mountains. He was sure they were much closer.

"You go on, Mac. Get water. I'll wait here . . . till morning."

I looked at him. I looked at the pistol in the holster. We had discarded part of our clothes, but that gun was still at his side. Now his hand moved to hide it as if to ward off my suspicions.

Was he thinking of a bullet for a possible winged attacker? Or for himself? I didn't know.

"Go," he said. "Orders."

I started. I walked slowly. In the sunset these eastern mountains now looked to be only five or six miles away. Perhaps his plan was best. If I could only be sure he didn't intend something else.

I looked back.

I looked in time to see a pair of orchid-tinted wings float down to skim close to the surface. The talons struck the sand—a little spray of dust—a graceful bounce of the body—then the wings folded, and *she* was walking up to him.

I started to run back. I fell, of course, for I was too near the point of cashing in, myself. There just wasn't a hundred yard dash left in my system. That was all there was to it.

I thumped down on my arms. Then coming up on my elbows, lying on my stomach, I watched. I tried to yell, but my hoarse voice wouldn't carry that far. For a moment she seemed to be swabbing his face with a cloth. Perhaps she had picked up one of our discarded shirts.

Only a moment of this, then she dug her talons under his weight, picked him up bodily. With a light spring from one talon, she took off in flight, bearing him away to the west, toward the Green Tooth Mountain.

CHAPTER VIII

News from Maxie

JUST as the twilight was fading to darkness she winged back again, and I knew she was looking for me. The light was in my favor. I saw her, a crescent speck silhouetted against the lavender sky.

By the time she circled over, it was too dark for her to see our tracks. Her instinct of direction must have carried her toward me. But if she expected to see a dark object lying on the sand she was disappointed. All she saw was sand. I took care of that with a little strategy of my own. I played a beach game and covered myself up, all but my Irish eyes and nose. There wasn't enough of me left in sight for Patrick McCorkle to have recognized his grandson with a flashlight.

Not more than seventy or eighty feet from me, however, she dropped something down that might have been a message on a parachute, and I thought to myself, "Corkie, that's for you."

She flew away and I scrambled to my feet. Would it be Wells' last will and testament done up in a sheepskin? Or a warrant for my arrest? Or could it possibly be a canteen of water?

I groped over the sand very stealthily. A horrifying thought struck me. Maybe it would be Wells' bones—his skull, perhaps?

With the best of luck I found the thing.

It was a shirt. And if that doesn't sound like especially good news, let me add that the shirt had been soaked in a spring and was soppy with cool water. Water than which none ever tasted better to Yours Truly. Now maybe you're thinking that a sweaty old army shirt isn't quite your idea of a sanitary drinking cup, whether the drink is water,

champagne, or peach juice. My answer is that in this particular desert on this particular night there were no complaints.

I drank. I also managed, with care, to store a little water in my canteen. Finally, I took a sort of bath with the damp shirt. All of which cheered me up tremendously.

I plodded on toward the east. And with every step, I thought to myself. "What a pair of wings wouldn't do for a fellow in this godforsaken world!"

Then I would think of the ironical thing they did do for Wells. He had spent days trying to get east across this flat. And this tricky pair of orchid wings had taken him all the way back in a couple hours.

Although I didn't know it that night, the five other living members of our party along that east range had been thinking a lot about wings, too. But the kind they had in mind were those attached to motors, propellers, bomb chambers, and a sight that would spot the center of this strange gory wingman's world. They were swearing to bring death and destruction to this land. I was to hear this talk a-plenty before long. But on this lonely night the only thing I knew for sure was that Wells had gone back west; and that I was still walking east, and that those damned starlit mountains kept moving away from me. So I lay down and slept most of the night away.

The next forenoon another most welcome miracle happened. Someone came out to meet me from those mountains, and it turned out to be Maxie Hammerstein with two shoulderloads of canteens.

"Pudding Puss, as I live and breed!" Maxie called with the air of an old lodge brother meeting up with me at the annual convention. "Where's the big cheese?"

I THRUST a thumb over my shoulder, which might have meant that he was just over the next sand dune. I felt a secret guiltiness over what had happened.

"Speak up," said Maxie, looking me over pretty skeptically, "or has one of these flying cats got your tongue? Not so unlikely, at that. Hell, man, you've been through another war."

I nodded and drank, and Maxie kept scanning the tracks back of me for signs of Wells.

"Ye gods, have I brought these extra canteens for nothing?"

I unburdened him of his extra load and said, "Come on. We'll take him some water . . . Water must be plentiful where you come from."

"Water—y e s. F o o d—no," said Maxie, falling into pace alongside.

The forenoon sun was on our backs. Away to the west I could see a little dot on the landscape that I knew was the old petrified tree where Orchid Wings had perched to watch Wells and me go by. And on farther, miles and miles that spelled at least a two day hike, was the Green Tooth Mountain and the other cathedral spires of the western range.

"Where the hell we going?" said Maxie. "How much farther?"

"Don't start asking questions like that this early in the morning. We're on our way back to pick up Wells. Let it got at that.

"Okay, okay. Don't get sore. I just wondered. The lads back yonder will be kinda curious, you know. They're sitting in the shade watching through binoculars. They've kept on eye on you and Wells for the last two days. We'd have signalled, if it hadn't been that now and then a pin feather would come floating down from the sky just to remind us not to stick our necks out."

To prove it, Maxie produced a little

collection of feathers which you'd have sworn could have come from your Aunt Mathilda's impertinent parrot.

I was rather alarmed that there should have been such close contact with these winged creatures. Had they been policing Maxie and Franz Cobert and the other three men, as Orchid Wings had been policing us? If so, what had happened to their appetities? Hadn't they overlooked a good thing in Maxie?

"You're plump," I said. "You're young and tender. Not middle aged and leathery like me. By their standards you should make a fine dish. With cactus berries—"

"Stop it," said Maxie, "or I'll bop you over the head with a canteen. After what I've seen of those gory freaks, it's no joke."

"Sorry," I said. "But seriously I don't understand it. How can you feel so safe? If they actually know where you are—"

"They don't know, thank heaven. We see them through a ledge."

"Through a ledge?"

"These damned mountains—have you found your way into any of them?" said Maxie, giving me an important eye. "No? Well, they're hollow. Some of them, anyway. Franz Cobert figured it out from geology and guesswork. The wing-men may not know it, but it's so—anyway in our particular mountain."

"Hot or cool?"

"Cool like a musty wine cellar. You keep sweating, but it's cool. We found our way in through the top, and spiralled down in the dark and finally discovered this crack of light. By George, it was wonderful. There was a four inch horizontal window of sunshine and air. We sit there all day long in the coolness, watching the winged men and women strut past so close we don't dare whisper—"

"And watch Wells and me plow across the desert in the heat, I suppose."

"Exactly."

"That's pie," I said. "You've been perfectly safe—"

"You're wrong there, Pudding Puss," said Maxie making a positive gesture with his short flat hands. "Danger stalks outside our window. If any man would sneeze at the wrong time, our game would be over. No danger? Hell, we're scared silly."

MAXIE stayed with me, and by the next afternoon, with a couple of clouds for luck, we were back at the Green Tooth Mountain.

We ascended to the pinnacle of the tower at sunset, and there we found what I assumed Wells had missed on his survey four days before. There were three or four triangular breaks within thirty feet of the top of the spire.

These openings were large enough to admit us. We walked in, stood upright.

Our path led downward in what Maxie described as a cinnamon-roll tunnel. Apparently these stone formations had formed in a violent whirl of molten rock, the cooling process and the weathering of centuries had eaten out these curving passages.

I stooped to examine what I thought was a thin sliver of metallic rock on the floor. However, it proved to be a very different sort of object. I picked it up.

"Some clues of Wells?" Maxie asked.

"We are on his trail, I hope, I hope."

"Could be," I said, pocketing the object. "What's this you were telling me about the wingmen not knowing these mountains are hollow?"

"Hell, maybe they do know," Maxie shrugged. "Maybe they've had me and the gang in cold storage."

I started climbing down through the

passage. For a moment he hesitated.

"Are you sure this is the trail we want? What did you pick up there?"

"This," I said, and showed him the small, trim orchid-colored feather.

CHAPTER IX

Cinnamon Roll Tunnel

"**C**OME on and spill the beans," said Maxie. "You've been holding out on me for two days. Why did we come here?"

"To look for Wells."

Maxie snorted. "You sound like a stuck record. That's all you've told me the last two days. For awhile I believed you. But the farther we went the more it didn't make sense. Why would Wells come all the way across the flat, and then suddenly turn around and go all the way back? Or did he? If he did, why didn't we find his tracks?"

"He flew back, Maxie," I said.

"Stop kidding."

"That's straight goods. One of the winged folks kidnaped him and made off with him. She flew straight toward this mountain. The least we could do is come back and try a rescue."

"*She? She?* Who's *she*? Don't tell me you and Wells have been getting acquainted with the female natives!"

I hated to go into that angle of Wells' and my experience. "It's this way," I began reluctantly. There I stopped. Peering out through the mouth of the tunnel I saw, away to the south, three or four of the winged creatures floating along against the sky. Maybe they were coming our way, maybe not. Anyway I took the dodge while I collected my thoughts. "We'd better find some water, Maxie, and get ourselves hid. These sky men come fast."

"You're telling me."

He started for the depths as if he

knew this path by heart. I tried to call him back.

"Hell, man, not so fast," I yelled. "I can't vouch for what we'll find down there. We may run into a nest of them. You saw this feather. It's dollars to doughnuts this feather came from the winged beauty that swept Wells off his feet—er—"

That stopped him.

But I wished I hadn't said it that way. Maxie's quick memory would come back to that remark. I tried to change the subject. "Speaking of doughnuts and dollars," I said, panting as I caught up with him, "I'm still carrying a good American fin, and don't think I wouldn't trade it for a dozen doughnuts—"

"Cut it!" said Maxie. "Ain't I homesick enough already? Talkin' about it don't help." He clambered on down through the rocks. The tunnel opened wider and became more comfortable, both in temperature and roominess, with every step. But it was getting real dark and we had to slacken our walk to a crawling pace.

We lowered our voices to whispers. I had a premonition that we might burst in upon a powwow of wings and appetites at any moment. But Maxie was used to coming and going through a twisted passage of this sort, and with his confidence we wormed our way down like a pair of rattlesnakes bent on evicting a family of prairie owls.

We heard no voices, human or half-human. We kept descending until we must have been lower than the level of the desert flat outside. I lost all count of the curves.

The path became tougher against our hands and knees, presently. Through a wide, gently graded arc we moved from blackness to blackness. A subterranean river no wider than a beer barrel had wound through here at sometime

in the past, and then gone dry.

"Listen?" said Maxie. "What do I hear?"

IT WAS a funny little gurgling sound, and at first I suspected it was the laughter of a female. But that's how a fellow's disturbed imagination can play on harmless echoes.

It turned out to be a small subterranean stream, cutting along at a swift pace. We practically crawled into it in our eagerness.

It flowed, fresh and cold, at a level a few inches below that dry watercourse we'd just traversed, which meant that this was the same old river, keeping busy making itself newer and deeper channels.

"Glory be," said Maxie, splashing his cupped hands into the water. "I can drink it dry and then bathe in it till it turns to mud—"

"After which you'll fill your canteen, I suppose."

"The name of this river is Hammerstein," said Maxie, "named after its discoverer, Mrs. Hammerstein's little boy, Maxie."

"Why not call it Max?"

"And have you spell it M-a-c-'s? No you don't. You go discover a river of your own."

"Then that dry one we just came through is mine," I said. "I'll name it after my prohibitionist grandfather."

"Your grandfather didn't drink? Now, wait a minute. Is my memory slipping, or didn't you tell me a story once about him winning a tavern contest?"

"Granddaddy Patrick McCorkle swore off," I said proudly—and I wished it hadn't been so dark, so Maxie could have seen the light of nobility in my face. "He swore off at the age of ninety-two—wiped the slate clean and started life over as a Pro-

hibitionist. And died ten days later."

"Well, well, well," said Maxie, feeling deeply contented over our good luck. We drank, and filled our canteens, and treated ourselves to cool baths that felt darned good to sore muscles.

"So here we sit," said Maxie, "at the conjunction of McCorkle and Hammerstein rivers—"

"No time for philosophy," I said. "This is a dangerous place. Anyone who enters this cinnamon roll tunnel is going to come down to water. I happen to know that—that *one* of the winged creatures already knows the way to this water."

"How do you know?"

"Because she filled our canteens."

"*She*—that same *she*?"

There I was with my foot in it again. This time Maxie wouldn't let me off. We tramped back through the darkness and he began questioning me. About halfway up the spiral we found what seemed to be a reasonably safe hiding place.

"So she filled your canteens?" Maxie pursued. "And she swept Wells off his feet. And she carted him off—and he didn't pull a gun and shoot her—or even clip her wings to make her an out-cast. That's our own Lieutenant Wells, the man who has many a German and a multitude of Italian prisoners to his record. Tell me, Mac McCorkle, what goes on with our lieutenant?"

"**H**E WAS sick," I said.

"Yes, I think so, in the head. The boys aren't going to like to hear about this."

"I know it."

"The boys don't like these winged beasts that feed on human flesh."

"I know it, damn it."

"They haven't forgot Biddle and Charrington—"

"He was sick, I tell you."

"So he was sick," said Maxie. He was silent for a long time. Finally he said, "So you think she brought him here. You figure she may have hidden him somewhere in these caves?"

"She flew this way," I said. "Whether she took him back to the others for a feast, or whether she dropped him in the bushes outside this mountain I wouldn't know . . . What are you doing?"

"Getting some matches," said Maxie. "We'll take a look around."

All around us were stalactites and stalagmites—a wonderland of fantastic shapes and colors. The chamber beyond our hiding place was about as big as one of the school rooms you remember from childhood; not as big as a church, but spacious enough to throw back weird echoes, even when you only whispered. You could see at a glance that the passages followed a definite pattern. Those to our right spiralled upward, those to the left, downward. Some of them, according to Maxie's experience, might lead to dead ends. These occasional chambers along the way were spots where three or four of the cinnamon roll tunnels had happened to converge.

Our hiding place didn't look quite so good by match light, and we changed to another, an alcove shaped like the inside of a football with one end chopped off. It was a very comfortable nest, in fact. But it happened to contain a few scraps of feathers.

Now a bed would have been most welcome, but a feather bed—no.

We skipped back to our first lair, twelve or fifteen feet away. There wasn't a sign of a feather in it. We held matches to all the niches to make sure.

"All right," I said. "Here we camp. Tomorrow morning we'll search the

outside of this peak. If we haven't found him by tomorrow night we'll change our strategy."

Maxie groaned uncomfortably, but he finally bedded down against the rock. "Mac, are you sure he *wants* to be found?"

"Don't talk that way," I snapped. "Wells is the most honorable guy I ever rubbed elbows with. I couldn't think any better of him if his name was O'Brien, O'Toole, or even McCorkle. He's a prince. You know that—after all he's done for the bunch of us—"

"Yeah, I know all that." Maxie was uncomfortable, I guessed, from the way he kept squirming around.

"I'd think after all you've hiked you wouldn't have any trouble getting to sleep," I said.

"After what you've told me," he said. "How can I sleep?"

"He's probably got a gal back home, or a wife," I said. "So don't be worrying on that score. If they let him live we'll have him back on our side in another twenty-four hours."

"He never had any girl friend back home," said Maxie dolefully. "I happen to know that. I grew up in the same block. Several of the fancy babes were crazy about him, but he was always too busy to notice them. That's sometimes the way with these handsome devils, you know. Gals falling on all sides. And he gets a notion to shun 'em and keep his mind on his business."

"All right, all right," I said. "Forget it and go to sleep."

"So here he is out on the desert away from everybody, and all at once it hits him that he's damned lonely. Not for your company or mine, but for something pretty and soft and warm, something that can laugh in a high merry voice—"

"My Aunt Mathilda's parrot," I said sarcastically, "is pretty and soft and

warm, and can laugh in a high voice."

"Yes," said Maxie. "Would it have any ideas about how to soothe a sick man? . . . Tell me, was this winged female good looking?"

"Yes and no. She looked too savage and bloodthirsty for comfort, in my estimation," I said.

"So she was ugly."

"The hell she was. She had a wild beauty all her own," I admitted. "Do you want to make anything of it?"

Maxie kept on grumbling. The last thing I heard him say before I fell asleep was, "The boys aren't gonna like it."

CHAPTER X

Cavern Pow-wow

THE voices that awakened us were so much like the lively human jumble of talk you might hear in a restaurant or a waiting station that it seemed we ought to be able to understand.

We couldn't. It was *wingmen talk*—one of the languages that your expert European linguists have overlooked.

However, Maxie listened ravenously for every word, pretending to me that he could catch an expression now and then. Owing to his few days of watching and listening through the slit in the cliff, he *did* seem to have a faint idea of what was going on.

Everything was still as dark as pitch, but we knew these talkative males were only a few feet away.

"They're waiting for someone to be brought down for a talk," Maxie whispered. "That *vonzel* is the word they used to mean *us*, as visitors, or prisoners, or something."

"It's Wells, then," I said. "They'll be bringing him down for a trial, maybe."

A faint light came from one of the upper tunnels and grew brighter as an

unseen party approached. We picked up the word for *light* at this moment. I was amazed, in the midst of this quiet excitement, to discover how quickly a few of their key words and expressions took root in my mind alongside certain clear-cut meanings.

We could see, now, that only three winged men were waiting in the chamber before our hidden alcove. Those three had been doing all that chattering. How many others were coming with the light? we wondered.

In the faintest of whispers Maxie and I laid our plans. Max had a pistol and four bullets. If this gang began any funny stuff with Wells, we'd let them have it, and take our chances hurling rocks at any that might be left standing.

The approaching party came into view, now, and it upset our prospects completely. There were three more winged men—husky fellows in the best of fighting condition. There were two women. An older one with sagging flesh along her sides and straggling hair. And the beautiful, shapely Orchid Wings. Finally there was, in the midst of this torchlight procession, the *vonzel*. Not Wells, but the German professor!

The second three men—the torch bearers—circulated around the room with eyes sharp for any signs of intruders. They marched over to the football-shaped nest and peered in.

"Oh-oh," I heard Maxie breathe.

We crouched down deep in the crevices and waited. The flickering light moved closer. The shadows of little stalactites above us sharpened and their points swung inward and were swallowed up in red light. My blood froze. I could hear the wheezy breathing of one wingman not three feet away from me.

The German professor may have cut the search short, quite innocently. He

was storming around talking first in German, then in English. He wanted a favor from these people and he wanted it at once.

So the torchmen, who were perhaps not looking specifically for us, but were simply taking their habitual precautions, returned to the center of the cavern chamber and joined the pow-wow. We were left in the near darkness. We didn't dare look. We could see only the weird shadows doing startling jumps across our ceiling, to suggest the gestures that the German and his hosts were indulging in.

THE professor's swearing was mostly in German; his questions were mostly in English—and for good reason.

"I know dare iss vun of you dot talks English. *You*, or *you*, or *you*? No? . . . Maybe vun uff your brothers? Doesn't vun uff you understand me? *You*, or *you*? Vas?

No one answered him. The rocky walls echoed the barely audible rustle of feathers. I was afraid that silent group would hear me catch my breath. What the professor had said fairly shook me. Was it possible that one of these winged savages could understand our talk?

If so, *how*? Had civilization come this way *before*? Had the mighty British Empire found its way into this lost land?

Or had one of these winged, legless, half human monsters flown into some land where our language was spoken, and lingered there to listen and learn?

"What a scoop some American reporter missed!" I said to myself. "If one of these human buzzards actually got away with a visit—"

The German started in again. "Don't look at me dot vay. I came here to find der vun dot talks. I would know him

if I could see plain . . . If I could see—see—see. Don't you understand vot I say, none uff you?"

His voice rose to such a roar I was afraid the stalactites would shatter. He was in a very confused emotional state. He complained of having lost his spectacles, otherwise he was sure he would know the winged man who had once talked with him, if said person was among those present.

"Vott's der sense talking to idiots?" he growled exasperated. "But how could I be here if vun uff you didn't happen to come to me in Berlin and answer me all my questions about der lost desert?"

Our curiosity moved us. We crept toward the light, peeked cautiously out into the torch-lighted cavern.

In the center of the ring of winged men and women this grizzled German stood, his frenzied red eyes turning from one to another of his hosts. His coat was missing, his linen trousers were turning to rags, his feet were bare. I knew now that he had gone through some of the same desert pleasures Wells and I had encountered. As for those dead-end tracks we had found, a wing-man must have picked him up. But he may have been unconscious. As he went on with his tirade he implied that he had expected a friendly reception here—but that not one of them had returned his gestures of good will.

I whispered to Maxie, "He's off his base. One of those birds rescued him from the desert sun. The ungrateful cuss."

Maxie gave me a wavering eyebrow. "Why does he want to get mixed up with those murderous beasts?"

The raving German broke off and his eyes lighted with a hint of terror. The eight winged creatures were moving slowly—very slowly—in a circle around him. The slight steps of their talons

might have been mistaken for nothing more than restlessness at first. But when he stopped to watch, attracted by the light *click-click-click* of their hard yellow claws on the stone floor, he saw. *They were moving in unison.*

"IT'S a feast march!" Maxie whispered. "That's the way hundreds of them did—"

"H-s-sh!" I crowded Maxie with my elbow to keep him back in the shadows. Then. "Look!"

The beautiful Orchid Wings stepped out of the circle. For the moment the march stopped. She walked up to the terrified professor. With her left talon she reached under her right wing as if removing something from a hidden pocket.

She handed the professor *his spectacles!*

For a moment he stared. She stepped back into the circle. He took two steps toward her. He blustered something in German. Then he shifted to English.

"Vare? Vare? Vare did you get dem? How did you know?"

You never saw a more innocent face in the movies than the countenance of Orchid Wings. She ignored the German's outbursts. She looked from one side to the other. The wings of one of the torch-bearers touched hers. He hopped a little closer on one talon. The flabby old lady began to stamp. Suddenly the whole circle was in motion again.

The professor stared daggers through his spectacles. Far from showing any signs of appreciating the gift, he burst into one of his expressive rages. He would teach them to steal his glasses. He would make them pay for all this undignified treatment. Just wait till he got back to Germany. He would have an army sweep into this desert and give them their dues.

"Don't you know ve are conquering der whole world? Ve'll get you, too. Ve'll blast your wings to dust. Ve'll scatter you ofer der sand . . . *Now*, does vun uff you understand me?"

It was an awful situation. The circle kept going faster until the wind beat against our faces from the flutter of feathers.

"What are we gonna do?" Maxie whispered.

"Witness a feast," I said.

"My stomach won't stand it," said Maxie. "What did he mean about getting back to Germany? Does he know the way out of this hole?"

"There's a chance," I said. "Get your gun ready. If that Nazi comes close enough for me to grab him we'll call off this feast."

"Ye gods, what's four bullets against eight pairs of wings? They'll make desert hash of us. How can we—"

"I'll tell you how—and they'll never see us," I said.

We crept back into the deep darkness and I told him. He made ready with the pistol. I returned to the rock barrier at the front of our little alcove that was like a closed gate between us and this pow-wow chamber.

THE torch-bearers had tossed their torches to the floor so as not to be impeded as the circle gathered speed. The bold black shadows were spinning fast now, crisscrossing in fantastic designs over the ceiling. The German was looking for a way out. I knew by his eye that he was about to make a break for one of these dark corners. The way the torches lay, ours must have looked as promising as any.

Suddenly he began to rush the circle. He ran from one side to another like a trapped beast. There were no locked hands to hold him. These half-human creatures needed their claws to stand

on. They simply bumped shoulders to turn him back. And when that didn't do they would kick out with one claw. He drew back and regarded his trouser leg, torn from the knee down. He rushed again. He retreated to the center of the ring with blood streaming around his ankles.

He reared like a savage bull. Then suddenly shifting his direction he whirled and plunged straight at Orchid Wings. He must have guessed her to be the weakest link in the chain. He socked her on the jaw with a heavy fist. Hell, I thought it would kill her.

She fell back, terribly jolted, and for an instant I was a bit dizzy from the sight of her hair flying. But she didn't fall. Not her. The German professor was the one who lost his balance. He came plunging through the broken line straight for our black corner.

Crack! A bullet whizzed past my ear. A flake of rock fell from somewhere. Rock and a few feathers.

It was the feathers that turned the trick. They dropped from the tip of an excited torchbearer's wing.

That did it. Instantly the circling maneuver was done. Seven pairs of wingmen's eyes turned on the unlucky torchbearer. And what eyes. They went ablaze with the wildest light this side of hell. It was the light of ridicule—mockery—contempt—but I tell you that with these birdmen it was a high passion.

Squawls and screeches rang out instantly. The big luckless torchbearer darted for an upward tunnel. Off he went, like a marked man fleeing from murderous gangsters.

Did the other seven winged folk stop to settle their score with the German professor? Did they stop to figure out whether he was a magician who could snap his fingers and cause missiles to

fly through the tips of wings?

They did not. They whirled on their talons and gave chase. All the way up the rocky passage the shrill chorus of their cries echoed.

The torches burned on. I took a deep breath of damp, smoky air. I hadn't had a chance to fulfill my part of the bargain—to grab the German out of the circle and slap a hand over his mouth. Orchid Wings' dodge had taken care of silencing him.

Maxie, good scout, had come through with a perfect shot. Now he came up beside me, grinning. We crawled out of our hiding place to have a look at our dazed prisoner.

CHAPTER XI

The Pit of the White Flames

THE fallen Nazi was a pretty soggy mess of flesh. I took my time about bathing his torn shins, for he was in the mood for a long sleep. I found a billfold and a few papers in his pockets. I also took his watch and his spectacles for safekeeping. He had no weapons.

Maxie kept an ear toward the upward tunnels meanwhile to make sure we'd have no intruders. The natives had evidently flown. All was quiet—much too quiet. What a good American yoo-hoo from one Lieutenant Wells wouldn't have done for my spirits.

"Let's get out of here," said Maxie. "Get your gun ready," I said. "This Nazi elephant is about to wake up."

The German groaned heavily and his face contorted with pain. His eyes half opened. He blinked at the nearest torch. Then he rubbed his hand over the top of his head, and something about the size of an egg on that baldish spot reminded him of his recent headlong dive into the stone wall.

"Shut up," I said.

"I neffer said nutting," he whimpered.

"Don't." I said. "Get up. You're going for a long walk."

"You got no right to order me—"

"Shut up!" I snapped. "You owe your life to us. We didn't do it out of kindness. We know you're an ungrateful beast. But we need you . . . On two feet, there. No false moves. Now walk."

He obeyed. He leaned against the wall heavily, and began groping along like a drunken giant. He was as bulky as Maxie and McCorkle added together, but he showed a healthy respect for us as well as our gun.

"Take this torch," I said. "Move right up that tunnel. No lagging."

Along the way he whined, "I vas chust trying to vine somevun I knew."

"I'm that someone," I said. "We met in an African village."

"I vas looking," he said, "vor a vinged man dot talks English."

"I'm the guy," I said. "What did you want?"

HE TURNED and gave me a bleary look out of his red eyes. The twist of his brutal face told me that he hadn't remembered me from our meeting around that freakish chromium gun; it told me that he hated me on sight and that he knew I returned the sentiment in full measure.

"Vare's your vings?" he growled.

"I lost them riding a jeep through a hailstorm."

"You're a man," he said.

"Both of us," said Maxie, "and don't you ever forget it."

"I vas looking vor—"

"We'll take you to him," I said. "He had dark wings—two of them."

"One on each shoulder," Maxie chimed in. "Sure we know him."

"Dark brownish-gray vings," said

the professor.

"That's right," I said. "And such a face."

"How did you know him?" said the professor, actually falling for our gags. "Ven did you talk to him? Vare—"

"I'll never forget that face," I said. "Or his voice, either."

We kept it up until we got all the dope the German would give. It wasn't much, but it was amazing. Evidently he had been in the midst of certain laboratory studies in Berlin when one of these winged natives walked in on him—a tall, long-haired old fellow with powerful chest and brownish-gray wings and a deep-throated voice like the low note on the pipe organ.

This apparition had walked in on the professor at midnight and had struck up a limping conversation in elementary English. He had informed the professor that he had been attracted to the laboratory because the knowledge had filtered through to him somehow that this German was delving into a theory that this desert existed. He declared that he had come to give the professor a friendly warning not to try to reach this land.

Maxie and I took this in with open ears. The German didn't hesitate to reveal his particular shade of honor. He had not heeded the warning. He had come here to prove that the desert was here, and he finally intended to claim it in the name of the Reich, and to send for a Nazi army to back up his claim.

And yet in spite of this bare-faced robbery he meant to use the English-speaking native as a "friend."

"So he told you the desert was here," said Maxie, "and so you've come to take it away from him. Nice business. *But did he tell you where here is?*"

"Here?" said the German. "Don't you know?"

"Of course," I said. "But you don't."

That made him angry again. "Didn't I vork oudt der theory myself? Uff course I know. Der desert uff der damned—it's no-vare dot anyvun knows. It's *uff* der earth *but not on der earth.*"

Of the earth but not on the earth!

I looked at Maxie. He gave me a skeptical eyebrow and muttered, "We shoulda brought those other torches. We could use more light."

After we emerged from the cinnamon roll passages we had plenty of trouble keeping the German out of sight. In spite of his close call down inside the mountain the fool wouldn't cooperate. A flock of natives were spinning around, keeping up a lot of gruesome excitement of their own—in fact, *committing murder.*

WE CAUGHT the import of this a little later. But for several minutes we had our hands full, sneaking this German down the steep mountain-side, finally pinning him down, hand and foot, with some sizable rocks. That was no small job. If Wells had been with us he might have invented some kind of rope or cord. We relied on strong-arm methods—rocks and threats and the promise of a drink of water every twelve hours if he'd behave himself.

We managed to block up the stones over his wrists and ankles so he'd be free from their weight—unless he took a notion to struggle, or sneezed—in which case a few hundred pounds could be jolted down kerplunk on some of his favorite bones.

"And remember—if you squeal," Maxie said, dusting his hands, "you automatically turn into buzzard bait."

We bent the surrounding bushes to camouflage him. Then we hurried around to the other side of Green Tooth

to see what that winged fight was all about.

There was a lot going on here that we didn't understand. These seven natives who had left the caverns to give their companion the royal razzberries had dropped that game in favor of fighting a newcomer.

Strange business. How could you tell whether these creatures were playful or serious? They could set up marching or flying formations around a human feast—and from *our* point of view a human feast wasn't an event to be sneezed at. But they would drop it in a minute to give the razzberry to one of their own. Still, *that* wasn't important compared to *this*.

This consisted of a new native—one I hadn't seen in the cavern—being chased down and fought by the three husky torchbearers.

Darned if this newcomer hadn't busted in on the wrong party. Apparently all eight of the Green Tooth cavern gang—Orchid Wings included—were willing to float around and see this intruder clawed to death.

That's what happened. They stayed with him until they killed him. Finally he lay out there on the bare sand, as dead as a stone.

The eight of them went into a moment's pow-wow. You could tell they were anxious over what they'd done. They were watching the skies to the south and east to be sure no other flocks were going to get in on this job. They came to a decision and acted on it.

One of the husky torchbearers picked up the dead form and flew northwest—toward a round topped mountain a mile or so away. The seven others followed.

"What's that place?" Maxie asked.

"Wells and I didn't get that far," I said.

"Looks like smoke coming out at the top."

"Heat waves," I said. "The air wavers everywhere you look."

"It wavers more over there," said Maxie, just to be stubborn.

THEY flew over and dropped the dead body. If my eyes didn't play tricks, it fell through the column of heat waves and squarely into the top of the mountain.

"The smokestack swallowed it up," said Maxie.

I didn't argue with him. Privately I resolved that I'd hike over and take a look before the next sunrise.

We put in a tough day of searching for Wells, and discovered no traces. At least Orchid Wings hadn't hidden him on the outside of the mountain.

Nightfall found us hiking over the sand again—a short jaunt northwest, into new territory, up a new rocky grade. . . .

Maxie peeked over the edge of the lighted pit. Whatever it was that illuminated his funny face made his eyebrows jump and his mouth fall open.

"Fire, McCorkle," he gasped. "I told you I saw smoke. Come on up and see."

I puffed and panted up the last few yards. The disk of dull amber light widened. It was a startling thing to look upon in the midst of a desert of blackness. A well of dimly lighted rock walls—a straight, deep shaft.

How deep? I crawled up to the edge on my hands and knees. Then, like Maxie, I became half-hypnotized by the weird sight.

Fire, Maxie had called it. That was my first impression as I looked straight down. A heap of white coals—almost pure white waves of heat flowing over them—silver and platinum and white gold all melting together in one beautiful liquid fire.

"She's burning up," Maxie hummed. "She's burning up—hair and all. And

damned if she isn't smiling about it."

I didn't get it. I was trying to guess how many yards it was to those liquid coals. Only thirty or forty—and the pit was scarcely twelve yards across. It was strange that the heat didn't whip up against our faces. Those white and platinum waves—more liquid than flame—seemed to rise half way to the top of the shaft. And when you began to study their form—

"She's burning up—and smiling," Maxie repeated.

When you began to study their form, you saw *her*—and she was a thing of fire. White fire. Fire like a thousand flowing flames of white silk ribbons. And her wings, thousands of little creeping flames of silver.

I looked at Maxie, and she was in his eyes, a beautiful winged goddess of flame, and she was tilting her head upward, smiling a most mysterious smile.

CHAPTER XII

The Whisper of Flames

I CAUGHT Maxie just in time. The poor sap was almost over the edge. I grabbed him by the ankles and pulled him back. He turned and gave me an unkind look.

"What's the idea?"

"I wouldn't be diving in there if I was you," I said.

"I wasn't aimin' to," said Maxie in an injured tone. "I was just reaching down to—er—"

"To *what*?"

"Well, she was lifting her hand up to me. When a gorgeous girl offers to hold my hand, how can I say no?"

"Don't be silly," I said. "She's fifty feet down."

"She was floating up, I thought," Maxie said uncertainly. He looked down again. "Hell, I don't even see

her. There, you've gone and spoiled everything. We've made her sore."

As I gazed down, my dazzled eyes went through the same strange experience for a second time. After I got used to that mysterious white and silver haze, there she was as plain as day.

She shifted her wings a little, looked up with a plaintive expression, as if appealing to us. She stroked her hair lightly. A stream of it fell across the full curve of her breasts of white fire. *She was rising toward us.*

She extended an arm upward. The palm of her hand invited me to reach down and touch her white fingers. The temptation of that moment was unlike anything I had ever known. Every nerve in my body urged me to obey her wish.

Thank goodness, Maxie had regained his senses by this time. He snapped an ugly remark just in time to stop me. Something like, "Don't be a sap, you sap."

He grabbed me by a wrist and hurled me backward.

"You don't have to be so rough about it," I said.

"I just got it doped out," said Maxie, his eyes burning bright. "What do you think happened to that dead winged man?"

"It went down in this pit, I suppose. Hell, I'd forgot—"

"And then what happened?"

"I don't know. Maybe she eats things like that. But the way she reached up to us I don't figure she was exactly hungry. What do *you* think?"

"The only way to tell," said Maxie, "is to try."

"Where'll we find the raw material?"

"Sand rats," said Maxie. "We can chase down a few at the foot of the hill and toss them in."

An hour later we returned through

the darkness and executed this very experiment. Two of the rats we threw in were still alive and kicking. One was dead. The results were all the same. *The little animals burned to nothing as they fell.* The white flames consumed them. Little wisps of yellow smoke came up through the shaft and faded into the air. That was all.

"There, Maxie, but for the grace of God go you and I," I said as the smoke disappeared.

"There, by the grace of Orchid Wings, probably went Gene Wells."

"I wonder." It was all I could say.

"The fellows aren't gonna like it," said Maxie. "They're gonna think things. They're gonna say—"

"H-s-sh. What did I hear?"

It might have been a sputter of flames, but it had the sound of a whisper welling up out of the pit.

On our hands and knees, as before, we peered in. *Her lips were moving.* She was whispering with the breath of fire.

"Why . . . don't . . . you . . . ask me . . . about . . . your friend?"

I gulped. I reached out to steady Maxie. He was about to go over again. He stammered something. "You—you talk our language?"

"I . . . speak . . . every . . . tongue," came the low, fluttering whisper. Her wings spread a trifle and she tilted her head with an air of pride. "I . . . have . . . need . . . to know . . . the words . . . of every man and woman . . . condemned . . . to live . . . in the desert . . . of the damned."

THE desert of the damned! Condemned to live here! Maxie and I both echoed the awful words. With one accord we moved out of her gaze. Somehow by common consent we shuffled back into the darkness. We threaded our way past scrubby trees

and bushes, over rocks, down the grade, and down and down, until our feet were on the flat sand again.

We hardly spoke, all the way back to the Green Tooth that rose black and massive against the stars. It seemed that we hardly dared admit to each other that we had seen and heard these strange things.

As we were bedding down in the bushes for a short night's sleep, I said to Maxie, "We broke and ran like a couple of ninnies. Do you know what we forgot?"

"What?"

"To let her answer our question about Wells. I've got a hunch she knows where he is."

"I've got a hunch," said Maxie, "that it wouldn't be pleasant to hear. I figure she's quick death for anything that falls her way . . . Say, what did she mean about being condemned to live in the desert of the damned?"

CHAPTER XIII

The Goddess Tells

THE troubles we had on our hands couldn't be handled in one day—or two. We hated to settle down to the business of routine living right here in the midst of murderous flesh eaters. But we had work to do.

Twenty times a day Maxie would say, "The gang'll get restless if we don't report back. They'll figure we and the lieutenant have given them the slip."

To which I would answer in a surly voice, "The gang be hanged. *They're* comfortable. Their ignorance is bliss. If they get anxious about us, let them come over and help. There's plenty of caverns left to be searched."

Maxie would gaze across the eastern flat till his eyes burned. I tried to keep up with our foot-by-foot search

among the tunnels. But he was set in his notion that Wells was lost. It took all the pep-talks I could muster to keep him on the job.

Meanwhile we had to keep the German and ourselves fed and watered—at the same time keeping out of sight of every chance pair of wings. This was a full-time job in itself. There were plenty of sand rats, but we had to be cautious about building fires. There were a few edible berries and fleshy weeds. Most of the roots were too bitter. I'd have given my last five for one medium sized Irish potato.

Our trips down through the tunnels to that fresh water river named Hammerstein were always perilous. We had to learn the whole maze of intertwining tunnels, eventually, to be ready for any passing emergency.

Some good luck arrived at our doorstep early one morning. One of the gang came across the flat.

The other three had chosen to remain on the east side. But they had pledged Slim to signal back to them when he found how things were going over here. They'd be watching, mornings and evenings, through the binoculars.

Besides his long, bony, somber face and his usual shuffling and awkward manners, and his scanty, frayed garments, Slim Winkle also brought some matches, a cake of soap, and—praise St. Patrick!—a pocket shaving outfit.

"I knew you birds would be needin' a shave," he said, unsmiling. "Too many whiskers and you'll get yourselves mixed up with winged man. . . . Where's Wells?"

"Oh—Wells?" said Maxie. "He's—er—say, where *is* Wells this morning, Mac?"

"Oh, he's around," I said. "Dibs on the razor. Yours, Slim?"

"I borrowed it off the French sergeant just before I left. He's missed it

by now. Told me he'd kill me if I borrowed any more stuff off him. He's gittin' pretty cocky, Franz is, tryin' to run the other three of us. So I took his razor . . . Where'd you say Wells was?"

"He's lost," I said. "We don't know where he is."

"Lost? Wells ain't a guy to get lost."

"That's what makes it bad, Slim. We've been searching till we're black in the face. Begorra, we need your help."

We took him into our confidence, in a limited way. His face clouded when he began to gather the implications.

"The fellows aren't gonna like it," Maxie said, not to make the situation any more palatable.

"I'll signal them to come across and help us search," said Slim. "They'll be only too glad to pay back some of Wells' favors. Only I wouldn't count on too much help from that French sergeant. He don't stay hitched for nobody. I'll signal them—"

"Wait til morning," I said.

"Why?"

"There's a reason," I said. "If too many of us show ourselves on this mountain we'll be seen, sure. All seven of us would practically be an invitation to a dinner party—"

"A fireless barbecue," said Max.

SLIM didn't quarrel over the matter but he still thought he should signal right away. But Max and I hadn't forgot our weird visit of the previous night, and we were holding a secret hope that we might go back to the goddess of white flames. Go back and get the information about Wells that we had missed.

That night we did go back.

We had left Slim at our camp in the bushes, and had slipped away on the pretext of an errand. But before we

got half way up the round domed hill he overlooked us.

"I was afraid you birds would get lost," he said. "Sure you know where you're going?"

"Just a midnight stroll," said Maxie. "Our old desert habits. An hour to kill so we go for a walk."

"Tell it to the postman," said Slim.

"All right, you're a right guy, Slim," I said. "We're taking you with us. Whatever Maxie and I see, you'll see it too. We might as well all three be crazy."

Slim surmised that he had let himself in for something mysterious, and he didn't miss. Within a few minutes the three of us were looking down into the well of magic fire.

"Heat waves," Slim said. He repeated it about sixteen times as if it was all he could say. Each time he said it with less breath, as if something was knocking the wind out of him.

That something was the goddess of white flames. Just to see her was enough to stagger you. But to hear her *whisper*—well, it's hard to explain to anyone who never had the privilege. How such a faint, fluttery vibration could set your nerves all a-tingle from your eardrums to your toes was positively frightening.

"You . . . have . . . come . . . back," she said, "to . . . ask . . . me . . . about . . . Wells."

Maxie and I were both keeping a firm grip on Slim to make sure he wouldn't leap over, the way we had started to do. For again she was rising in the fiery shaft, reaching her white hand upward. The little pinkish flames of her lips curved in an enticing smile.

"Come," she said. "I will whisper . . . the secret . . . in your ears."

She floated upward higher and higher, until her hand almost touched the

upper edge of the wall. We drew back. I could feel hot puffs of air against my cheeks. I jerked my hands backward as the hair on my fingers singed.

"Are you . . . listening?" Her whisper was very close to my ears—much too close for comfort. I couldn't see her now. But I saw Slim gazing straight over the top of the wall, as if he could see her floating in the heat waves above the surface of the hill. He didn't try to run as we had done, but stood his ground, staring in rapt wonderment.

"Where—where is he?" said Slim hesitantly.

"He is nesting," came the whisper from the translucent heat waves, "on the very pinnacle . . . of the mountain . . . which you call . . . the Green Tooth."

I WATCHED Slim's eyes. His gaze descended slowly, and I knew he was seeing her sink back into the fiery pit. It was curious to see him smile that way. Slim didn't often smile.

Now she again became visible to my eyes, floating downward like a million tiny flames, tiny flowing flames like little streams of illuminated liquids, white, pink, platinum and silver.

The last I remember of that visit, the reflected light of the goddess was still burning in Slim's eyes, and he was still sending down his curious smile toward the sinking flames, now fifty feet below us.

Maxie saw too, and he gave me a look as if to say, "Poor Slim, that freakish fire has really got him going."

Slim didn't say much on our night's hike back to camp. But Maxie and I, now being veterans of these mysterious by-paths, felt qualified to discuss the whys and wherefores of her secret knowledge like two unsentimental scientists.

"When you boil it down," I said, "we don't know just how she got her inside information. We're not exactly positive that she's right. Not till daylight gives us a chance to climb up there. He may be there alive. He may be there dead."

"I don't doubt she's right," said Maxie. "Fact is, I think she only spends her nights in the fiery furnace. I think she gets around and picks up all the gossip through the daytime. Otherwise, how would she have known he was up there? She can't look down on that pinnacle from her hilltop. She must get around—or how would she know all the different languages?"

"What bothers me," I said, "is, what's her game? Is she aiming to help us straight through? This business of our being condemned to live in a land of the damned sounds to me like we're only puppets and playthings to her."

"That's what I say," said Maxie. "You just know that she could have reached right up and pulled the three of us overboard if she'd wanted to. She's got something up her sleeve."

"She didn't have a sleeve," said Slim sourly. "I took special notice—"

"Then she's got something up her wing feathers," said Maxie.

"I don't like it the way you're talking her down," said Slim, getting more serious than he usually got about anything.

"Well, if we find Wells it's a feather in her hat," I said. "We've no reason to distrust her, except we know she's quick about burning any bodies that get tossed her way."

"Just so she hasn't got Wells," said Maxie. "By the way, Slim. If we find him, you won't have to signal any bad news to the rest of the gang. They can stay where they're safe, and we'll hike over and join them."

"By now they're already on their

way over here," said Slim. "Now don't get mad at me. I figured you needed them, for more reasons than one. So I signalled them this afternoon to pack up and come on over."

CHAPTER XIV

Franz and the Gang

THEY arrived at dawn two days later, and the first crack from Franz Cobert was, "Who the devil ran off with my razor?"

The French sergeant shot the question at Slim, who only stared at him with a wry frown. The sergeant's whisks, thus singled out for our attention, made him a bit ridiculous. Maxie stepped up and tweaked his cheek.

"Hey, there, Frizzlepuss, have you seen anything of a sergeant named Cobert?"

That made the sarge mad. He glared hard at us. We were all three clean-shaven this morning. He and his three companions had the run-down look of vagabonds who have hoofed it across the Sahara.

"Get us to your camp," he snapped, "and be quick about it."

"We'll have to make a safer camp," said Slim. "These winged men don't give us much rest around here."

"Why hasn't Wells already provided it?" said Sergeant Cobert.

"Wells isn't here," said Slim. "That's what I tried to tell you when I signalled—"

"Then I'm in command," said Cobert. "Lead us to your camp and give these men some food and water."

They needed it, no doubt about that. It was evident that Franz Cobert had treated himself to the best share of the canteens. The two Smiths were dragging, about to drop. Whitey Everett's lips were parched and swollen and his

eyes were almost like a dead man's.

Whitey Everett mumbled the name of Wells. The Smiths, too, registered curiosity about his not being here. But the sarge told them to shut up and come on. It was time to get ourselves out of sight for the day. The winged men had already made their appearance in the skies to the south.

We hiked around the base of the Green Tooth, picked up our scanty supplies, and pushed on to the west to establish a new camp. It was an all day's job, moving from cover to cover in search of a suitable place. But a very valuable maneuver, as later events proved, for it removed us from the more active danger zone of Green Tooth.

We settled in a cavernous bank in the low hills nearly a mile to the west of Green Tooth. The winged creatures didn't often come this way. Their routes were quite well defined. Except when hunting food or chasing a victim they customarily flew from peak to peak.

More definitely, they flew back and forth over the ranges that led to the octagon. Only a few of them—as Maxie and I had observed—came as far north as the Green Tooth. Rarely more than eight.

During the past two days we had followed the comings and goings of these eight. We had decided that they were the same eight who had held the powwow down in the cinnamon roll tunnel. This was evidently one of their exclusive haunts.

Although they would fly south to join their hundreds of cousins elsewhere, they didn't welcome any intruders in this vicinity. The treatment which they had meted to that one rash spy proved that they weren't in favor of making the Green Tooth caverns an open house.

FOR the past two days, following our second visit to the goddess of white flames, some of these eight winged men had hung around the pinnacle of the Green Tooth so much that we hadn't had a chance to try communicating with Wells—if, indeed, he was up there.

We had watched from safe distances, always in hopes of seeing a finely shaped human head and a pair of husky shoulders show themselves at the point of the rocky tower. Often we saw Orchid Wings. But not Wells.

It had been a discouraging and painful vigil. He might be there—alive, a prisoner. Or ill, perhaps unconscious.

He might be there, dead. Or worse, slowly dying, thirsting, too weak to call.

We gave Franz Cobert a few evasive answers when he got around to inquiring more about Wells' absence. It was too obvious that Cobert was pleased to be in command—that he would be displeased to have Wells return. So we knew better than to confide the whole truth, much less to discuss our rescue plans with the half-French sarge.

The water supply at our new camp was not plentiful, another reason why the winged men didn't come this way. It was a seepage spring in the ledge that soaked away in the sandy slope without ever forming a stream. But Slim went to work on it, gouging an oblique trough in the ledge that caught the seepage and led it into a rock basin. It was clean and cool and plentiful as long as we didn't waste it.

That first afternoon proved our change an advantageous one. I had to admit that Franz Cobert had used good judgment in his choice. While the sun baked the west side of Green Tooth, we watched from our cool, shadowed ledge. With the aid of the binoculars we could keep tab on the comings and goings of the six winged men and two women over the Green Tooth.

The more we watched the more we wondered. Were those eight pairs of wings intentionally looping the loop for some mysterious purpose—or was that just their natural way of enjoying the evening air?

"I don't like the look of that," said Maxie. "They're starting in on another ceremony."

When the procession of wings darted down into the cavern entrances and disappeared, I felt easier, somehow. For once their ceremonial rigamarole hadn't involved any victim, so far as we could see.

And all this while, strange as it may seem, I still held to my faith in the flame goddess' word—that Wells was somehow "nesting" on the towering pinnacle.

"If we could only be sure they'd stay down in the tunnels through the night," said Maxie, "we'd climb that tower before sun-up."

We were favored with a fairly dark night, and the three of us—Maxie, Slim, and I—meant to make the most of it. By the time we left camp, Sergeant Cobert was sawing heavy logs in harmony with his three desert-weary companions.

On the way up the side of the Green Tooth we stopped to care for our German prisoner. In another day or two we would move him to our hills where we could keep an eye on him.

WE FOUND him mumbling mathematical formulas in a guttural tongue. We told him he was crazy with the heat. But he swallowed a canteen of water and went right on with his problem in logarithms. A smart guy, all right. Still, it wasn't hard to guess that he was clinging to his notion of bringing in a German army to conquer this land. And in view of what was happening in Europe, that wasn't too

smart. That army had its hands full.

We left "Old Cheese puss" to his mathematical solitude, and hurried on.

The stars were just bright enough to warn us. No, this wasn't the night to climb the rocky pinnacle. We'd never make it. That procession of wings was going on again!

Black against the stars, they circled like giant bats—eight of them. In the darkness we couldn't tell which were the athletic young huskies, which was the old woman, or which was the beautiful Orchid Wings. But the audible flutter of wings and the occasional chortle of their foreign voices warned us that this was a native ritual. It was a party that three uninvited guests named Winkle, Hammerstein and McCorkle would do well not to crash.

Down on the flat we made use of the remaining hours of the night writing a message in the sand.

We wrote it in huge letters. I remember scraping my feet across the sand in twelve long strides to cut the first bar in the letter *W*. Maxie and Slim followed me. We dragged our feet along like kids making a fox-and-geese pen in the snow.

We finished just before dawn. We were sure we'd tramped it deep enough that the sunrise would turn it into a line of purple shadows. If my handwriting—or rather, footwriting—was legible, it would read:

Wells—where R U?

Give us a sign.

We scooted for cover at the first break of gray in the east, for those wingmen were still at it, swooping around the pinnacle like June bugs around a porch light. We climbed a few yards up from the base, to have a little elevation from which to view the sand writing when the sun peeked over.

I dozed for an hour. Then I came to, with Maxie nudging me, whispering,

"Wake up, Pudding-puss, and get an eyeful."

I shook out of it and gazed out at the sand. The message was just crooked enough to tie a snake in knots, and still plain enough to be read.

But Maxie and Slim weren't looking at it—they were looking up.

High above us that weird procession of wingmen was still playing merry-go-round near the top of the pinnacle. Then I saw.

Orchid Wings was among the group. In fact, she was the leader. And in her talons, looking to be of sound mind and body, was one Lieutenant Gene Wells!

IF HE was in agony, you couldn't tell it. If he was struggling to break free and spill down over the mountain-side, you couldn't notice it.

Be he did see our sand-writing. You could tell, by the way he suddenly jerked his loose hanging arms and swung his head, and stared down like a baby being carried away from its playthings, that *he had got it.*

We figured that was the moment for us to act, even at the risk of our necks. We jumped out of hiding and ran down onto the flat where he couldn't help seeing us.

It was a dizzy run, keeping our eyes turned to gauge Wells' reactions. Running and waving and shouting and drawing a pistol.

It was Maxie who had the gun. I wondered if he could clip a wing from this distance—or if he would miss and bring the whole band of wingmen swooping down to sink their talons in our flesh.

Wells saw Maxie draw that pistol, and I'll swear he waved the flat of his hand down at us, as if to say, No, don't shoot!

Maxie didn't shoot. He stumbled in the deep-cut sand letters and went

sprawling. For a moment the procession was almost squarely above us. Then Orchid Wings banked and sailed off to the north. She shifted her burden a little, as if taking a firmer grasp with both talons around Wells' mid-section. He straightened his body like a diver, streamlined to the points of his toes.

Then he looked back at us and his hand swung in a gesture that was not so much a salute as a farewell wave.

Off they sailed into the cloudless north sky.

The other wingmen no longer followed. They circled, gathering altitude, and swung back southward along the range of peaks. Two of them—the elderly female and a male—alighted on a peak less than a mile away. The others flew on toward the octagon in the invisible distance.

Slim was still gazing northward, and his face was so long he might have bumped it on his knees.

"Where the hell is she taking him?" he asked. "Why the hell didn't he put up a scrap?"

I didn't try to answer. I only joined him in gazing. Soon Orchid Wings and Wells were only a speck above the north horizon, then the speck was out of sight.

By that time there was a small dust storm rising in our corner of the desert, caused by Maxie. He was running around over the sand kicking hell out of the letters.

CHAPTER XV

Slim Clears the Air

THAT was one of the bluest mornings of all my life. It left me numb like a pillar of stone. And that's the way I remained for a good many days to come.

Time hobbled on—days and days of time—time that meant less to me than it means to the lifer in the pen. What had happened had knocked me into a cocked hat.

Among the three of us who had witnessed the strange ceremonial departure of that morning a bond of secrecy formed. An almost unspoken bond. For not one of us admitted aloud what all three of us knew: that Lieutenant Gene Wells had voluntarily deserted us for the company of a winged girl.

He must have deliberately hidden from our sight until that morning. He must have scorned our efforts to find him. Our good intentions to pull a rescue must have been a joke to him.

Not one of us spoke these thoughts aloud. I'd have smacked anyone in the mouth who had dared. So would Maxie—or Slim. That's how deep our loyalty to Wells was rooted.

But the deepest of secrets, you know, will find their way to the surface with the passing of time. The words you hold back, the sentences you cut short, the little tell-tale expressions that flit across your face with unexpected turns in the conversations—such things make your companions start asking questions. Little by little they begin to weave the threads of implications.

Once, watching through binoculars from the eastern mountains, they had seen Wells picked up and carried away by Orchid Wings. Now they gathered that it had happened again. And that Wells was doubtless still alive, existing in some remote region, under some strange spell which those flesh-eating monsters had cast over him.

As days and weeks passed and no more was seen of him, the gang dropped all hope of rescuing him.

Sergeant Cobert strutted around the camp, barking enough orders to remind us he was in command. He had a non-

sensical notion that our predicament was temporary; that sooner or later some wandering plane would fly over and discover us; and that we would be rescued and honored. If that happened, he would have the pleasure of receiving a medal for holding us together and keeping up our discipline.

The poor illusioned fool! He should have had an earful of the inside dope we'd got from the German professor. This desert was *of* the earth but not *on* it!

But the egotistical sarge didn't use the right approach toward the professor.

"I'll give you one more hour to loosen up that damned tongue and tell us what you're doing here," he threatened. "We've got guns, you know. But not much patience. You're a prisoner of war. A prisoner that won't talk is a nuisance."

THE German groaned, and asked that we'd invent something more comfortable than the homemade rope with which he was now tied. Then, failing to make any impression on the sergeant, he went on mumbling numbers and algebraic formulas to himself.

That "one more hour" threat was never carried out. When Sarge Cobert returned an hour later, accompanied by Privates Hammerstein and McCorkle, the German professor turned out to be the little man who wasn't there. *The homemade ropes had been cut.*

That was a bad night for Franz Cobert. He was almost too mad to know what he was doing.

"Somebody's going to be court-martialed and shot," he said through clenched teeth. "There's a traitor among us."

The gang of us gathered around and watched him in comparative silence. He paced and cursed and worked himself

up into a frenzy. When any of us tried to quiet him he snapped us off.

Finally Slim Winkle got a word in edgewise. "Are you sure that one of us cut him loose, Sarge? Are you positive?"

"Whoever did it," said Cobert, "did it to insult me. It's not only treason, it's insubordination. I'm going to find out who did it, and give him what's coming to him."

"You may be right about one of us doing it," said Slim. His bold words put the sarge in a listening mood. "Maybe one of us did it to remind you—"

"Yes?"

"That we ain't afraid of you, none of us."

The sergeant went white with rage. But now he listened, and Slim talked on in his easy, droll manner.

"That's how it is, Sarge. We don't mind you bein' in command. In some ways maybe you're good for us. But it wouldn't be healthy for you to lord it over us too much. This desert is big. We're all learnin' how to live in it. I figure we're gonna be here the rest of our natural lives."

"That's absurd. They'll rescue us!" the sergeant blazed.

"If you're gonna be our leader," said Slim, "you'd better be practical. You'd better take our opinions into consideration. I think we're stuck here. And, speakin' frankly, I think Lieutenant Wells is of the same opinion."

That blast shook all of us. I heard Maxie give a sort of choking sound like he'd tried to swallow and couldn't. I don't think Slim knew he was going to say it. It sounded like an admission that Wells had thrown us over. But before Cobert could say so, Slim sidetracked him.

"We're not afraid of you, Cobert. You know that, now. We've been

scared silly by these wingmen. Everyone of us lives in a sort of suppressed terror, knowing that at any hour they may swoop down and choose one of us for a feast. That's enough to be scared of. If we can keep outa reach of their claws—and keep peace among ourselves—that's all we can hope for. We're finding almost enough to eat. We've got enough drinking water—except on the days that Maxie washes his socks in the basin."

COBERT might have let it go at that. The rest of us, I believe, were pretty well satisfied with what Slim had said—even though it wasn't an easy prospect to face.

Cobert's thin lips twisted into a scowl. His proud authority had been squarely defied by Slim. He spoke with a bite in his words.

"What you say doesn't shed much light on the German's escape."

"What's the difference if he did escape?" said Slim. "The desert's big. Let him go out and forage for himself as long as he doesn't bother us."

"So you cut him loose," said Cobert.

"I did not."

"I think you did," Cobert growled. "You're just the sort of a son-of-a—"

Nobody helped Slim Winkle do what he then did, because nobody needed to. Slim had two good fists of his own, and enough power behind them to put over some history-making blows. He proceeded to make history, and before he got through, Cobert's map was changed.

CHAPTER XVI

I Take to the Air

I CAN'T recall that Cobert ever tried to give another order after that night. And I don't believe we ever bothered to call him sergeant again. No

one went to the trouble to remove the chevrons from his sleeve. At best, all our clothes were falling apart fast enough.

What Slim had said served as a sort of unofficial honorable discharge for all of us. If we were here for life it was high time to forget we had been Private so-and-so, subject to the command of an officer.

Within four months after the morning of Wells' departure, accordingly, we had begun to find ourselves more or less resigned to the fates. We were here, making what adjustments we could to the problems of keeping our sunbaked bodies and withered souls together.

The seven of us lived together about as peaceably as you could ask. Allowing for the fact that there were no O'Briens or O'Tooles, and only one McCorkle, we were nevertheless a pretty good gang.

The two Smiths were not related. One was "Marco Polo" Smith, a talkative chap who liked to claim that he had been all over the globe. He was good natured and enjoyed spinning lies as a picturesque pastime. Sometimes he'd get carried away by his yarns and slide out of his share of the work, but nobody seemed to mind.

"Kid" Smith was one of these helpful guys. He liked to be complimented when he'd done you a favor. But the minute he figured you were taking advantage of him you lost his good will.

For instance, when Franz Cobert got laid up with an infected foot and had to have a lot of hot water applications, it was Kid Smith who stuck by him like a faithful slave. He stuck, that is, until he overheard Cobert boasting too loud.

"As long as that sap will run my errands for me I'll keep limping," Cobert said to Marco Polo. "I've got him

right where I want him."

At that moment, so I was told, Kid Smith appeared at the corner where our path turned into the hillside shelter. He had three or four desert rodents, cleaned and ready for cooking. It was late in the afternoon and Franz Cobert was hungry.

"You can cook mine rare," Cobert said, trying to hide his surprise at Kid Smith's untimely entrance.

Kid Smith gave his usual good natured smile but said nothing. He went to the clay shelf and helped himself to a few matches, picked up a canteen, and turned to Marco Polo.

"Tell Slim and the others I'll see them later," Kid Smith said. "I'm in the mood for a long walk."

He slung his meat supply over his back, then, and walked off.

"Come back here with that food!" Cobert yelled. He started to hobble after the Kid.

"Better get off that foot," Kid Smith yelled back.

That evening Maxie and Whitey Everett and I stumbled onto the Kid making his own camp within a half mile of the hillside shelter. We had some nuts and roots, and soon Marco Polo came along with a clay crock full of berries. While we feasted, Marco gave us the story of the Kid's walkout, and we all had a good laugh, the Kid included.

"I may be soft on the outside," the Kid said, "but there's a limit to my good nature—and if Franz Cobert is smart he won't forget it."

None of us would forget it. Cobert was left to his own devices. Right away he discovered that his foot was well and that he could help gather fruits the same as the rest of us.

THE camp gradually spread into a series of stopping places along the

hills where we felt safe to build fires and sleep overnight unarmed. The more we spread out, the less we got in each other's hair. And the more hermit-like our existence became.

But you could usually find either Franz Cobert or Whitey Everett, or both, holding down the original fort under the hill ledge. This was our central stronghold. Whitey Everett stayed close to home base because he was haunted by memories of Biddle and Charrington.

He had known them well. Their misfortune had rooted a fatalism firmly in his mind. You could see it in the furtive way he watched the skies. He rarely walked out in the open in daylight. He took dozens of little precautions, when he bedded down for the night, to lessen the danger that a passing band of wingmen might choose *him*.

When wingmen did fly along the peaks from time to time, you could see Whitey go pale. It got on your nerves. It was as if he *knew* he was marked for the next feast.

Well, the next feast came, one day, and it didn't happen to involve Whitey—or any of the rest of us, thank heaven.

Instead, it made a victim of someone I had never seen before—*someone I never could have seen if I hadn't come to this strange desert.*

Of the seven of us who now lived in the hills, I was the only one to witness this gruesome event. And I got in on it only because I was a friend of Lieutenant Gene Wells.

You may readily guess that Slim, Maxie and I often talked of our first visits to the goddess of white flames, and were intrigued by the accuracy of the information she had given about Wells' "nesting" place.

The three of us had often gravitated northward at night to try to communicate with her again. Our efforts weren't

successful. Somehow she refused to appear before our eyes as she had done before.

I suspected that Maxie and Slim may have made an occasional visit to this well of fire in private. I couldn't forget that Slim had seemed to see her more clearly than I. But neither of the fellows gave out any news, if they picked up any from this source of wisdom.

Among ourselves we never spoke of her without recalling the danger that she might sweep us into the flames.

"It's a damned good place to stay away from," Maxie would say.

I went back alone late one night, impelled by my deep burning curiosity about Wells.

It was almost dawn as I ascended the round-topped hill. The first streak of pink in the graying sky threw into silhouette two figures. One was a female with wings. The other was Wells.

The wings moved gracefully, about to take the air. I froze in my tracks. I knew at once, then, that this well of fire was known to Wells and Orchid Wings. They were just now taking their leave from visiting it.

It was a picture—these figures silhouetted against the pink sky—Wells, half naked, strong and muscular, and his weirdly beautiful companion, with streaming hair and breath-taking curves.

SHE sprang into the air, flew low along the brow of the hill. As she circled over Wells, he leaped, and her taloned arms caught him up. Then they sped away through the gray skies.

I looked after them, wondering all the things I had wondered a thousand times before.

I hurried to the top of the hill. If Orchid Wings and Wells had communed with the goddess, perhaps I would find her too . . .

"You came . . . to me," she whispered with the soft flutter of her warm breath, "because . . . I sent for you . . . Did you see . . . your friends?"

"Friends?" I said, puzzled that she should make it plural. "I saw Wells."

"She . . . would also . . . be your friend."

My heart pounded almost as loud as her whisper. "She—*she* would be *my* friend? How?"

"You . . . must trust," she said. "You . . . must trust *him* . . . and her . . . They need you . . . He has asked . . . for you . . . to come."

"Come where?" I was whispering too, for the simple reason that my voice was gone.

"Listen closely," she said. "I will tell you . . . where to go . . . Someone . . . with wings . . . will be there . . . to meet you . . . Do not be afraid . . ."

I climbed the Green Tooth mountain from the sunny side, to keep out of sight of our hill camps. This was something I mustn't confide to anyone, not even Maxie.

The morning sun was hot on the back of my neck as I neared the pinnacle. I paused. Here were the openings that led down into the cinnamon roll tunnels.

Click . . . Click . . . Click . . . The feet of a wingman were approaching from the darkness of those depths. I could hear, too, the soft swoosh of wings against the rock walls.

He emerged and walked right up to me. His face was heavily whiskered, his forehead was wrinkled; his eyes, although oldish, were bright with a very human alertness and a hint of a twinkle.

With one talon he reached under his wing for a small clay jug. Then, in a low, leathery voice he enumerated a good English word.

"Drink?"

Under the conditions it was the perfect gesture of friendship. He evident-

ly knew how a sluggish, non-winged biped feels after climbing a steep mountain slope in a hot sun. I drank.

He placed the jug in a rocky niche, and proceeded to demonstrate that he knew a second good English word.

"Ready?" he said.

"Ready," I affirmed.

His huge brownish-gray wings spread. His stiff whiskers fairly rattled as he jumped into the air.

He swung a talon at me. I leaped as I had seen Wells do. He cleverly caught me up in his tawny muscular arms, and we went sailing off into the cool breeze high above the hills.

CHAPTER XVII

Victim from the Past

WE WERE headed for the octagon.

That was the same way that Orchid Wings had taken Wells.

Suddenly such high anticipations filled my thoughts that I almost forgot the chills in my spine. Still, I must confess that the flapping of wings right above my head gave me some apprehensions—the chief one of which was, where would I be if they quit flapping?

Old Rattle Whiskers didn't exercise his English vocabulary any more. Consequently, when he deposited me I was still in doubt whether he actually understood my language or had only succeeded in parroting a few words.

"When will you come back for me?" I said, clinging to his wing feathers.

"Later," he said. Then he gave a low chuckle, probably because my blank expression amused him. He was off at once with a flutter and a buzz of feathers and whiskers.

I shook myself with a feeling that there might be feathers sticking to me. I rubbed the sore spots where the claws had dug in. Then, for the first time in

my life, I stopped to realize what a clumsy locomotion walking is—compared to flying.

This particular mountain was shaped like a huge starfish. It was covered with a waist-high thickness of yellow, wide-bladed grass. The slope was gentle, and I knew at once where to go.

Halfway down the point toward the hexagon someone was waving at me. Praise be to St. Patrick, it was Wells!

"Private Toby McCorkle reporting for duty, sir," I said as I advanced. He acknowledged my salute. There was a briskness in his manner suggesting that he expected that salute, and that military obedience was exactly what he wanted. A strange manner for a friend you haven't seen for four months.

But he broke the mood as quick as he could reach out and grab me by the arm.

"McCorkle, you old son-of-a-gun," he laughed. "Fancy meeting an Irishman out in this feathered desert. Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"Now that's a good one," I said. "Where have I—"

"I know, I know," he said. "What you and the fellows think about me wouldn't go in books. We'll skip that, Corky. We've got work to do. We've come here on the long chance that we might save a man's life."

"What man?"

"A new arrival. Probably someone we don't know. Orchid Wings learned about it. It's what they call a new *vonzel*—a visitor to this land."

"Like us?"

"I suppose so. There's a lot of mystery about these newcomers. Orchid Wings knows about them before most of the tribe. But she can't seem to tell me *why* they come or where they come from."

I caught my breath. "Orchid Wings talks these things over with you? How?

Do you understand feather talk?"

"She speaks a bit of English, my friend," said Wells, giving me a proud wink. "She's a very apt pupil."

I followed Wells down the slope toward the octagon flat. The grass was high enough to offer us concealment if we needed it. But as we neared the floor of sand it thinned into scattered patches.

"We'd better hold back," said Wells. "It wouldn't be so good, being sighted by the main tribe when their big shots are in a feasting mood."

WE SETTLED down and waited. I kept looking all around, as nervous about this business as Whitey Everett would have been.

"Where's Orchid Wings?" I said. "And what happened to old Rattle Whiskers that brought me?"

"Wherever they are, they're keeping watch, the same as we are. No one knows exactly *where* this arrival will take place. You know how it was when we made our entrance."

"We just dropped in," I said. Then as I gazed over the landscape I spotted the mountain upon which the memorable landing had taken place. It all seemed ages ago. The terror of those first days had faded considerably with the passing of time.

And yet the danger hung over us again today as truly as it had then. We were back in the region of the main tribe.

But it was not the whole tribe that went in for feasts. Wells had learned that it was the small inner circle of leaders, particularly one big shot by the name of Thunder Splitter.

"The whole tribe fell in as a part of the ceremony, you remember," Wells recalled. "But only a handful of the privileged class joined Thunder Splitter in the actual eating."

"Are you telling me that most of these wingmen wouldn't eat human flesh?"

"I wouldn't say that," said Wells. "Even you and I might eat human flesh if we got hungry enough. What I'm saying is, this big guy who holds the reins over the main tribe is the chief promoter of this feast habit. And for some reason his appetite goes on a rampage whenever he knows there's going to be some new arrivals."

This was supposed to make me feel more comfortable, I suppose. But it didn't. If a thousand wingmen joined in on the festival they couldn't be much more civilized than the man who got the meat.

"How," I asked, "does Thunder Splitter know there are new arrivals coming? Does the goddess of white flames confide in a heel like him too?"

"Orchid Wings doesn't know," said Wells. "She thinks he must feel it in his bones."

"His wishbone, I suppose. By the way—" I squinted a searching eye at Wells, "just how do matters stand between you and Orchid Wings?"

"In what way?" Wells shot back coldly.

"Socially speaking."

"That," said Wells, "is one of the matters we don't have time to discuss."

For a minute the silence was pretty cold. The noonday sun did its best to keep things from chilling, but it took a few warm words from Wells to defrost the conversation.

"I like Orchid Wings," he said slowly. "We began to understand each other during those first days when she followed you and me along the west range. Later I learned that she could speak a little English. She learned from her godfather—that's the whiskery old gentleman who flew you over here."

"Rattle Whiskers—but where did he

learn?"

"I think he must have made a trip to the English speaking world. Don't ask me how he could. All I know is that he and Orchid Wings and six of their friends have a different angle on this desert life from most of the tribe. I think they must have a pull with the gods."

"The goddess of white fire, you mean?"

"Perhaps. If we're doomed to spend the rest of our lives here we may break a path for the scientists who are sure to follow."

We talked, then, of the German professor, his motive conquest in coming here, and more recently his escape from our bonds.

"So you never found out who cut him free?" Wells said, smiling. "Did you try to follow his trail?"

We hadn't been able to do so, I explained, because a light rain had obliterated all tracks.

"Well, just to put your curiosity at rest," said Wells, "the German hiked most of the way across to the east range, and your friend Rattle Whiskers carried him over the last few miles. Now he's living over there in the tunnels where he can rest up, and study, and watch the wingmen through a crevice."

WELLS went on to say that he frequented that same observation station himself. However he made it a point not to come face to face with the professor.

"Spying is my business," said Wells. "Every day I learn more about this desert life. From the top of a peak a stranger might look down and say, 'What a barren country. How simple life must be in these great open spaces.' Well, it's far from simple, believe me."

"It's damned primitive," I said.

"Yes, but it's also damned compli-

cated. That brings me back to Orchid Wings. Do you realize that she's in danger of becoming an outcast?"

"Why?" I said. But Wells stepped over my question and went right on.

"Do you realize that the main tribe is building up trouble for her? That devilish Thunder Splitter held a big mass meeting a few days ago, and in the presence of a thousand or so wingmen he read the colors of the sky and the colors of the mountains, and then he uttered a damning prophecy. *The Flash Death is on its way.*"

"The Flash Death?" I groaned. "It sounds like a secret weapon."

"In Thunder Splitter's hands that's just what it is. It may just be his clever psychology. Still, I don't know. I thought the same about the Fire Goddess until Orchid Wings took me to see."

I didn't understand how Orchid Wings could be responsible for the coming of some mysterious Flash Death. When I questioned Wells on this point I brought back a little of that chill. I tried to smooth it over.

"If it was that murder of a winged spy—the one they dropped to the Fire Goddess," I said, "take my word for it, Orchid Wings wasn't guilty. I saw it happen."

"They were all guilty—almost. But if they hadn't done it, their family secrets would have leaked back to Thunder Splitter and they'd all have paid a penalty of death for holding out on him. It was simpler to murder the spy and dispose of him so he'd leave no traces."

"So they were all eight guilty," I pursued.

"Almost. That is, their killing would have been murder—in the eyes of the gods—if the goddess of white flames had refused to consume him. But she didn't. It was simply *pffft-*

gone! So, according to their code, everything was all right."

It was a helluva weird code, any way you looked at it. I recalled that those desert rodents we dropped in also went *pffft*—and were gone. Did that mean they deserved to die, the same as the murdered wingman?

But Wells was being practical in taking the traditions of these people at face value, I realized. After all, if this was to be our life, we'd better streamline ourselves.

"To return to the subject of Orchid Wings," said Wells—and it was unquestionably his favorite subject, "this trouble that threatens her is Thunder Splitter's doings. He looks at the colors of the sky and the mountains—"

"And sees Orchid in them, I suppose?"

"And reads a prophecy out of his own imagination. He says that someone—some *female*—is guilty of disloyalty."

"Oh-oh. What kind of disloyalty?"

"Tribal disloyalty."

"What," I asked, trying not to sound too terribly curious, "does tribal disloyalty consist of?"

"That," said Wells, "is a topic in itself. I don't have time to go into it just now."

HE was right. Our time for talk was over. For at that instant the anticipated miracle happened.

A lone cloud of pink smoke appeared right over the center of the octagon floor. It drifted with the breeze, growing larger and darker until it became an angry, blood-red storm cloud.

It boiled out like the smoke of an explosion. Then it rolled into a sharp edged arm of rock extending out like a root from the base of the peak.

Lightning flashed out of the cloud, then, and the thunder blasted against our ears. The concussion of that blast

jolted the ground under our feet and sent a shudder over the waves of wide-bladed yellow grass. Echoes of the thunder growled back from the neighboring mountains.

"Ye gods!" Wells barked. "Every wingman in the whole countryside will know what's up!"

At once the red cloud dispersed like so much steam. It melted almost as darkness melts before light. Then out of the explosion fell the load it had carried—a human figure, clad in some sort of theatrical costume. He was falling the last thirty feet of his journey. He lit running.

"Help me surround him," Wells was yelling, at first glimpse. "Make him understand he's got to hide or he'll be killed—er—both of them."

Yes, a second man had appeared, falling out of the melting red mists. He too was dressed in theatrical garb.

Wells and I were instantly on the run toward the two newcomers. Already a few winged figures were taking off from mountain peaks. Soon they would be swarming over this playground of violence.

The second of the newcomers must have been knocked unconscious by his fall. He rolled to a stop with an arm hooked over the back of his neck and his shiny headgear pushed down over his face. He didn't move.

We were within a fifty yard dash of these two arrivals—close enough, I recall, that I felt a kinship for them immediately—if only because they had human legs.

Our race turned automatically toward the man who had fallen. The other fellow had a chance to look out for himself—a darned good chance. He was carrying a shield and a sword. And he was in a healthy fighting mood. In fact, his sword was bloody, and the ornamented yellow shield was marked

with red-stained gashes.

He saw us running toward his fallen comrade, now. He stopped cold, and he whirled to take in the landscape. For a moment he reeled. You could tell he had just then discovered that someone had changed worlds on him and he didn't know what to make of it.

WE YELLED at him, but the words missed fire. He obviously didn't understand our language.

"Look out for him!" I shouted to Wells. That bloody sword looked ominous. This fellow was an ancient Greek warrior right out of battle. He suddenly starting striding for us.

"Give him a race," Wells cried. "Lead him off. I'll get the other—*Look out! The wings!*"

Picture yourself trying to get an army tank to chase you into the tall timbers at the same time a plane is trying to smack you from overhead, and you have a fair gauge of my confusion.

I heard the first of the wingmen zip over my head, too close for comfort. I ran, as Wells had ordered. This ancient Greek warrior came after me.

I dodged back and forth to keep him coming, but kept a safe margin of distance between us. He was no dash man, weighted down with a metal helmet, a clumsy shield, and that big iron sword.

When I turned for a glance at Wells I saw some fists and talons swinging. That first ambitious wingman had tried his murderous claws on a tough fighter. The sand was clouding up, but out of the whirl you could see those flapping pinions shudder as a heavy blow thudded against a wingman's jaw.

I wished I could have stopped to bet on the winner. But duties called me elsewhere. The Greek chased me up the slope and right away he got his shield and sandal straps and sword tangled up in the tall grass.

That gave me a moment to breathe, and gaze, and go sick. The wingmen had picked up their chosen victim. There were too many wings for Wells' two fists. He had stymied the first two or three attackers. But the next wave went for the unconscious newcomer.

They bore the fallen Greek back to the center of the octagon. Their sharp-eyed fellow citizens were flocking in by the hundreds. There was nothing more anyone could do. Wells, momentarily in the clear, sprinted back to join us.

Then we saw the dreadful ceremony of the feast repeated.

The bewildered ancient warrior with the weapons also saw. The horrifying sight told him only too plainly what we had been unable to convey with words. His fellow traveler was being torn to bits by four or five bloodthirsty wingmen in the center of the fluttering circle.

CHAPTER XVIII

Thunder Splitter Marks Us

BEFORE that feast was half over I had my first close-up of the Number One Feaster, the high mogul of all the wingmen, the mighty Thunder Splitter!

It happened because Wells' fists had made an impression on some of the first attackers. They weren't willing to take one and leave three.

And so, with the feast half done and the hundreds of fliers still going through their weird formation, back came a few of the pride-wounded huskies to bear down on the rest of us.

We'd have got our everlasting if it hadn't been for Orchid Wings and Rattle Whiskers. As a pair of air jeeps they did all right by Wells and me. They had picked us up in the early mo-

ments of the feast. They had taxied us to higher ground and hid with us. Consequently we had safe seats near the top of the grandstand, so to speak, when the feasters came back to look for us.

The ancient Greek warrior, however, was still standing down there near the flat, looking like he was trying to figure which way was up and down in this world. They spotted him.

"That's Thunder Splitter in the lead!" Wells exclaimed as the attackers came on. "I never supposed he's be so bold. He's going to fly right at that Greek's throat."

The trick that Thunder Splitter played just then might have been good strategy for a leader, but to me it looked dirty. Followed closely by four others, he dodged out of his course just before coming within striking range of the Greek warrior.

The second wingman, accordingly, plunged on. *He* had to spearhead the attack. His talons went for the warrior's head. Zing! They slipped over the metal helmet.

And at almost the same instant—whack! That big iron sword flashed an arc through the air like the blade of a windmill.

Feathers flew. A dark dripping of blood followed the swerve of the wingman as he circled crazily to the ground. His wing had been chopped in half and his muscular body had taken a deep gash.

This was no wing-tip loss, calling for tribal ridicule. It was undoubtedly a mortal wound. You could hear the wingman screaming as he lay there pounding his talons on the ground. And that, mind you, was the fate Thunder Splitter missed by being careful.

Then there followed a race between the three other huskies and the Greek warrior. The Greek knew it was time to run, but he meant to slash the wasp-

like torso of any pursuers who came too close.

None of the three kept so well out of reach as their leader, Thunder Splitter. His boldness went to words not deeds. He circled wider and wider around the retreating Greek.

As he sailed near our hiding place I got a clear view of his piggish, brutal face. His large teeth jutted forward, his eyes showed white with a fishlike bulge. His heavy locks of hair were a dirty black. His gluttonous jowls and the evil forward thrust of his head reminded you that he was more than a killer, he was a devourer of human beings.

MY FLESH was still creeping from the sight of him many minutes after he narrowly missed seeing us. He circled back.

Meanwhile another of the pursuing wingmen fell victim to the ancient warrior's bloody sword. And that, I'm glad to say, put an end to their following him. At least for the time being he was safe. They picked up their own dead and wounded and flew back to the celebration. I wondered how Thunder Splitter would explain this fiasco to his feast mob. A pretty sorry mess as a by-product to his celebrating!

It was some comfort, at least, to know that the newly arrived Greek could take care of himself. When the gang back at camp should hear of him, I reflected, there would be lots of excitement. There might be a boom in iron and steel, too, if these rugged peaks would yield any metals. The effectiveness of a ready blade against a pair of wings had made history today.

But before the day was over I was to see no more of the Greek, but a great deal more of the number one feaster. Perhaps I had been too hasty in judging the mighty Thunder Splitter as an ad-

versary who lacked nerve.

"He got his eyeful of that Greek with the sword," I said to Wells, as we watched the feast from a distance. "Now he's getting his stomach full of the other one. Do you reckon that'll hold him for the day? Or will he remember us?"

Wells talked it over with Orchid Wings and Rattle Whiskers. It was interesting to hear them speak in their limited English vocabulary, always in brief, crisp sentences.

"We are marked," old Rattle Whiskers boomed.

"He will follow us," said Orchid Wings. She cast her dark eyes over the wide sun-baked landscape. "He will see signs."

"You mean," said Wells, "that he and the tribe will go after us in earnest?"

"After me," said Orchid Wings. "I have fought the feast before. Thunder Splitter knows. When I speak against the feast, he frowns. He snarls. Now he is ready to bite."

"She is right," Rattle Whiskers said, and his comical old face was deeply serious. "Today we have been seen. Today he knows. We have tried to spoil his feast."

Wells nodded gravely. "They know we're all in league on this deal. If McCorkle and I hadn't been on the ground they might have got both of those vonzels. But that sword play threw them for a loss. They'll exact a price for that—and any of us will be fair game."

Then Wells turned his eyes on me. He must have guessed that I felt like a sap to let myself in for all this. *He* might be in league with Orchid Wings and her little group of Green Tooth rebels. But was that any reason for me to blunder into the same trap and buy myself a death warrant?

"Sorry, McCorkle," Wells said.

"Don't mention it." I tossed it off

with a wave of the hand. "You're not the only one that feels for historical mavericks who stumble into this fireless barbecue."

Evidently Orchid Wings and Rattle Whiskers didn't get me. They turned their question-mark faces to Wells.

"He means," said Wells, "that he is with us. He is against the feast."

We winged away over the east range. The novelty of riding in these underslung air rickshaws tickled my funny bone. Way down yonder were our shadows slipping over the crags and up the slopes as smooth as a mechanical toy.

WE WERE floating along at a comparatively slow pace, though it might have seemed swift enough to the ones who were doing the work. Above the constant whiz of brushing through the air you could hear the bits of conversation.

Would the wingmen come out to the Green Tooth and attack in force? they wondered. Should Orchid and her old aunt, her three husky cousins, and the rest of the family leave this part of the desert and take themselves to some lonelier part of the world?

Could they go far enough to be safe from pursuit, yet not so far as to be in danger of *falling out of the world*?

Wells and I exchanged significant glances at this strange idea. Could one fall out of this world, just as he had fallen into it?

I hung there in the talons of Rattle Whiskers, skimming along over green and pink and golden cone-shaped mountains, the cool winds of the upper altitudes blowing against my face. I laughed to myself. Yes, a man could fall out of this world without much trouble. If this wingman should let me drop, it would happen—but quick. I don't know whether I'd find my way

into a better world or a worse one, but I'd sure as hell cancel this one off in a hurry.

My laughter gave out suddenly. The flapping of wings took on a new tempo, and for good reason. We were being pursued.

A sizeable squadron of wingmen—perhaps two dozen of them—were following through the skies in our wake.

They were still a long distance away, but gaining fast. And they had no burdens to impede them.

We swooped toward the earth to take advantage of the concealment that the passing peaks would offer. Old Rattle Whiskers turned to get a good view of the pursuers. I craned my neck, caught the cold light in his keen eyes.

"Feast is over," he reported in a weighty voice. "They are coming for us."

"Is Thunder Splitter among them?" Orchid Wings asked.

"He leads them," said Rattle Whiskers. "He will be a mad one."

"He'll be satisfied with nothing less than our bare bones," said Wells.

"I think," said Rattle Whiskers, "that you are right."

CHAPTER XIX

The German's Seismograph

IF YOU'VE seen movies in which there's a hair's breadth race for the blockhouse before the Indians closed in, or a run for the bomb shelter before the big ones started popping, you've got a dim idea of what we went through.

The afternoon shadows helped. Orchid Wings and her bewhiskered godfather knew how to make the most of shadows. Wells and I asked to be dropped so the four of us could scatter and take our own chances. But our winged carriers clung to us. Before

nightfall, after the most breath-taking afternoon of hide-and-seek in the history of any McCorkle, I found myself at length climbing down through the dark passages of a cinnamon roll tunnel. My three companions seemed to know where they were going. I was only too glad to follow.

We were safe, now. Safe in the same degree that an escaped criminal is safe. Safe as long as we chose to keep in hiding—as long as we lurked in tunnels where no large search parties could pounce upon us in full strength. These wingmen, naturally enough, preferred to do their fighting out in the open, not in the narrow passages of tunnels where their wings became a handicap.

Within the next two days we found that we were in the presence of company. The German professor was living here, carrying on his studies in a rocky chamber with a narrow horizontal opening to the outside world.

The outside world was alive with more company, whether we liked it or not. This steep rocky mountainside must have been the wingmen's haunt that the gang had looked out upon during our first week. In several cavernous rooms we found these long horizontal "windows" of space—cracks beneath a ledge, varying from two or three inches to a full foot in depth.

Of course no creature with wings would attempt to crawl through such a narrow space. A man might—but Wells and I didn't. We were quite content to sit inside, breathe the fresh air that filtered in, and eavesdrop on the passing show in silence.

"This is where Franz Cobert and the gang got onto the wingman's language," Wells mentioned.

By this time, of course, I had already learned a number of the key words. But now my vocabulary expanded by leaps and bounds, and I spent hours at

the rocky window gathering the news.

Every night that week the wingmen held a huge mass meeting. Old Thunder Splitter was the chief orator. There were others who could stir your blood, too, by the very weight of their voices. But he was the one who made them jump up and down and clack their talons on the stones in a demonstration of excitement.

He was orating about the colors in the sky and the mountains. Everywhere he looked he read signs of trouble.

The fact was, there had been a few rather startling landslides in recent days. The effect was such as to frighten superstitious people. For the whole side of a mountain could change its color if the avalanche happened to carry away an outer layer of the cinnamon-roll formation.

Interpreted, Thunder Splitter was saying, "You must be warned, my men and women, that great destruction is hovering over us. The lands may rock with the terrors of Flash Death."

It was hard to tell whether he himself believed Flash Death to be an actual god, or simply a geological process. At any rate he made believe he was on speaking terms with it—and that was where Orchid Wings' danger was growing hourly.

In his orations to the public Thunder Splitter didn't start in naming names. He would say, "Somewhere there is one of us who has defied the gods of our tribe. The mountains have begun to tremble. Somewhere among us—or among the private nests far and wide around us—someone can be adjudged guilty."

His gestures would take in the whole wide desert, but his eyes, sweeping the distant peaks, would always come to rest looking across the flat in the direction of the Green Tooth.

AFTER such orations the crowd would carry on with excited jabber for half the night. After most of them had finally flown home you could still hear the low voices of a few small groups, gossiping on until the dawn.

"She's a disgrace to the tribe," some would say. "She has criticized Thunder Splitter after every feast."

"Where did she get those notions that vonzels should be respected?"

"She not only respects them—she falls in love with them."

"How do you know that?"

"She has been taking one of them all around the desert on her wings."

"That does not prove she loves him. Perhaps he has made a slave of her."

"What power could any awkward wingless creature have? These vonzels are accursed of the gods. Look at them. They are weighed down with heavy legs. Even if they could grow wings they could never fly until they got rid of their legs."

"Perhaps with his pretty words he has made a slave of her."

"She should have made a feast of him. And a feast he would have been, indeed, if Orchid Wings had not protected him—him and his vonzel friends—with scores of her clever little schemes."

Some of those who participated in this gossip were a bit more charitable toward Orchid Wings. There were a few who even dared to whisper unkind words about Thunder Splitter.

"How should *he* know that the Flash Death is hovering over us preparing to strike? Do you know what I think? He is a glutton for the flesh of the vonzels."

"But he eats them as a ceremony."

"He pretends to. He pretends that it soothes the anger of the Flash Death for him and his friends to eat the flesh of vonzels. But how can this be so?

Does the blood stream of his body mix with the blood stream of the gods?"

"You are talking like Orchid Wings," the fearful listeners would object. "Orchid Wings received her dangerous ideas from her godfather, who had the misfortune to fall into another world far away. Be careful what you say, or you too will help bring on the Flash Death."

It was a burning problem with many of them to know what to believe. If they dared to grow skeptical of Thunder Splitter's nearness to the gods, they were reminded that he *could* and usually *did* predict with accuracy the coming of new vonzels to this land.

So Thunder Splitter grew in strength. And those who wanted to befriend Orchid Wings would scout over the mountains trying to find her and warn her.

"If she isn't guilty," others would say, "why doesn't she join us in these councils? Why doesn't she appear to defend herself?"

It looked bad for her, all right. I found myself sinking deeper and deeper into a dilemma.

When I thought of the gang and how we all resented having Wells taken away from us I wanted to hate her.

When I listened to this tribal gossip and saw that they were all in turmoil because she was flying in the face of their traditions, such as human feasts, it seemed again as if she ought to be hated.

BUT the truth was, I was beginning to like her, and respect her—yes, and depend upon her. It was through her that I now had old Rattle Whiskers as a friend, ready to taxi me around, when the nights were dark enough for me to venture out.

Then, too, it was plain that Wells was a thousand per cent for her. He seemed darned pleased with himself to be her

confidential friend. And there was no doubt that she was helping him with some of the answers to this dizzy puzzle, the desert of the damned.

"As soon as we have time, Corky," Wells would say, "I'll give you a couple earfuls of my theory about this place. But the main thing now is to keep on the job. Between the tribe's talk and the German Professor's experiments we're gaining ground."

Our means of spying on the German was pretty crude and cheap, but it was getting results.

After our first run-in with him, Wells was afraid he'd pick up and leave these cinnamon roll tunnels rather than chance another encounter. He was one scared German, believe me. After that hard siege of imprisonment a few months before, he thought we'd kill him this time.

Killing him was the last thing we wanted to do. We wanted him to go right on with his studies, and the more he mumbled aloud, the better it suited us.

Well, for three or four days he slipped around through the black caverns as cautiously as a panther, and hid where he thought he'd see us pass between him and some burning torches he'd placed to trap us.

But we outguessed him and didn't show ourselves. At last he took for granted we were gone, and went on with his work.

The daring thing we did, that gave us the best view into his cavern laboratory, was to view it from the outside of the mountain.

Yes, it was devilishly risky. But we used a bagful of tricks and got away with it for nearly two weeks. Orchid Wings helped us with the original plan, which was to creep outside at night with our faces blacked with mud, and hide ourselves in the bushes with our

blackened faces right up to the crevice beneath the ledge. In other words, we became camouflaged statues at the outer corners of the professor's long horizontal window. When the daylight poured in we could see him at work. The light was on him. Our faces were in the dark. As long as we could lie there without sneezing or falling asleep and snoring we could watch his every move.

AN INGENIOUS guy, that German professor. He had somehow dragged in three long posts of stone which he could build into a tripod. Then, with a lot of stout homemade rope woven of yellow grass, he suspended a fairly round boulder.

"It's a regular seismograph," Wells told me. "That pointer you saw him working on today is supposed to make little jiggle marks if there's ever any disturbance in these mountains. He's been having trouble getting the weight to hang free and yet have the point register a clean line."

"Disturbance?" I said. "In my opinion there's already been a hellova lot of disturbance in these mountains."

"He's testing for geological disturbances—such as earthquakes. The way he keeps studying the marks, and the way he keeps mumbling about gravitational forces, he seems to think something's coming."

Our daylight hours of spying would have been terribly uncomfortable if we had had to wait there in the bushes until darkness. As it was, the old sun would burn down mercilessly before we could get away safely. But, fortunately, the German had a habit of falling asleep in the middle of the forenoon. As soon as he would sink into his thunderous snores we would simply roll in through the horizontal opening, stop for a moment's inspection of the seismo-

graph chart, and patter down the tunnels for home.

CHAPTER XX

Geological Shakedown

THE first bounce of rocks somewhere across the sandy flat echoed across to my hiding place with a mild little thump.

I was lying there in the bushes with my face wedged in the narrow crevice. Suddenly this funny little tremor jolted my body. The faint smack against my bare toes might have been a couple kicks from Tom Thumb. A thimbleful of sand jumped into my right ear.

The professor was bending over the chart beneath his suspended weight at the moment. He almost leaped over the tripod.

"It's coming! It's coming!" he yelled. He ran up to the wall a few feet from my blackened face and peered out at the distant line of mountains.

"Landslide!" he yelled. "Dot's it! Dot's it!" And he went into a lot of guttural exclamations all for his own benefit.

Another thump of shaking earth struck through my body. I suddenly forgot I was supposed to be hiding. I rolled over and looked.

Far to the west, through the haze of forenoon sunshine, I could see a cloud of dust rising from the base of a tall, jagged peak. The sight startled me, more so because that peak normally appeared pink in the morning light. Now a long vertical slice of blue showed.

And widened before my eyes! Another sensation of quaking. Another boiling cloud of dust from the base of that peak.

In that exciting moment I must have felt some of the same thrill as the German, who had awaited this moment. I

forgot my manners and joined him in shouting.

"Greatgranddaddy McCorkle, it's a sure-nuff earthquake."

My outburst came nearer to knocking the German off his pegs than the jolt underfoot. He jumped back, stumbled over the tripod, and came down with a splash on his clay water jug.

I rolled into his private laboratory, bounced to my feet, and scampered down the black tunnel calling for Wells.

A half hour later the shocks began in earnest. I hadn't found Wells. Nor had I seen anything of Orchid Wings. They had not returned from a night's errand to the west range—an errand which I had guessed to be a visit to the goddess of white flames.

I didn't go back for any further exchanges with the German. If the shocks were going to grow to serious proportions there was no telling how he might plan to take advantage of them. In a crisis he was a good man *not* to be around.

The fuller realization of danger came to me when I saw what a commotion these forewarnings had caused among the wingmen. Mothers swooped down over the hillsides screaming like a midnight fire alarm, calling their children to fly home as fast as wings would carry them. I saw one mother skim along the sand, pick up five little winged urchins, and sail off into the sky.

I didn't wait to catch the full picture of this confusion. But I heard orders and counter-orders shouted back and forth. Five times before I got out of my cavern hide-out I distinctly heard the savage cry going the rounds that Orchid Wings must pay for this. She and that vonzel must be captured and delivered to Thunder Splitter.

BLACKNESS! And total blackness! My legs couldn't carry me fast

enough. Coming up from that cinnamon roll tunnel I used every muscle from toe to chin. A jolt had shaken the horizontal window closed just as I had started to crawl out. I had left a couple fingernails—a small price to pay for escaping the squeeze of a few million tons on the back of my neck.

The tunnel rocked under my feet as I progressed. But there was daylight, now, just a few yards ahead. It was daylight dimmed by a rolling cloud of sand and dust, trailing down in the wake of tumbling rocks.

Lucky for Orchid Wings that she hadn't returned. Wings could have been clipped short by some of the faults that sheared within inches of my stinging fingers.

Now I was out. I jumped back. A boulder bounced down across my path. The odor of sparks mingled with the dust smells. The roaring and crashing came and went like erratic thunder, now close, now only low, sullen echoes from some distant hills.

Should I try the dash amid this fury of tumbling death? If I could once get down to the wide level sand these shattering stones would never reach me. And the wingmen? One glance reassured me. They were soaring for altitude. They meant to rise above the sand clouds. The flat desert was mine—mine to play ostrich in—if I could make it.

I started. Then I fell flat. With a crackle like breaking thunder, a slice of stone as big as the side of a courthouse ripped off the steep bank of mountain directly above me. Down it came, sliding, faster and faster. Above it the scar of dark purple stone widened.

"Granddaddy McCorkle, here comes your grandson Toby!" I uttered the words, hardly knowing what I was saying. The one picturesque thought which leaped into my mind was a bit of

whimsical curiosity. I wondered whether that spreading scar of purple stone would retain a spot of red where Mrs. McCorkle's son Toby got smeared against it.

CHAPTER XXI

Rattle Whiskers' Riddles

A YELLOW talon slipped under my mid-section like a pie knife in the hands of an expert. Wings flapped—I saw them out of the corner of my eye, though I couldn't hear them for all the ungodly roar. Then up, and up, and out of the dust cloud I sailed.

It's strange, the way the vision of something you expect will sink into your mind's eye almost as if you actually saw it. I looked down at that wide slab of rock, sliding over me—almost. It roared over the tunnel opening where I had just been, and I gulped, "There goes Toby McCorkle—but for the grace of Rattle Whiskers."

When the slab had passed on down to a crushed heap of dead stone, I could see through the fog of dust that there simply wasn't any tunnel entrance left.

Where, I wondered, was the German professor?

"Thanks, friend," I called up to my winged carrier as soon as we were in the comparative quietness of the echoes that mingled high above the desert. "I thank you, and you can be sure all my grandfathers thank you. I'd have gone to join them in another half second."

Rattle Whiskers put a strong wing to the gale. He was calculating his strokes, like a truck driver trying a new and dangerous road. It didn't make for a very satisfactory conversation. He answered my questions in riddle.

"Are you taking me to the goddess of white flames?"

"The wind is taking us."

"I must talk with the goddess," I said. "And I must find Wells. Do you think he will be there?"

"Ask the goddess."

"Tell me," I said, "what brought on this earthquake?"

"Does anyone know?"

"I mean—what do *you* think? Do you take any stock in this silly rot about breaking tribal customs? How can anything that you do cause these mountains to shake off their sides?"

"Please do not blame it on *me*," said Rattle Whiskers.

I wasn't getting an ounce of opinion out of him. I tried other lines of attack.

"You've lived here with the natives all your life. You should know—"

"Not all my life," said Rattle Whiskers. "I have spent a share of my days in a different world—yours. Careful, there, don't be squirming. You don't have to look up at me to talk." He took a tighter grip on me and strained his muscles against the accelerating wind.

"I mean you've lived here long enough to know everything. Tell me, did you ever see an earthquake like this before?"

"No two earthquakes are ever alike."

I followed through and got a little information on this point. Yes, he had seen some small earthquakes, and any number of avalanches and minor landslides. But he reminded me that there were no vast heaps of broken rock at the bases of most of these peaks. That plant life had never been destroyed on many of the slopes. That the desert rodents abounded in spite of all past geological changes.

"I do not know," he said, "whether any sand rats will live through this shaking. I do not know whether berry trees will still grow."

"Maybe the fire goddess will know," I suggested.

"Maybe the fire goddess will not live through," he said.

IF HIS pessimism had been a thing of pounds, the weight would have hurled us down like a stone. And yet it wasn't unwarranted pessimism, considering the way the landscape was changing form. It was just an absence of optimism—and one could not be optimistic when flying through volleys of air concussions. Through a thundering roar like armies rolling over a hundred bridges. Over a desert flowing with massive waves of gray sand. Toward peaks that were taking on new stripes of nakedness as great slices of their rocky sides shattered and fell.

"Do you think," I said to Rattle Whiskers, "that there is a love between Wells and Orchid Wings that has brought on this catastrophe?"

"Earthquakes are earthquakes," he said. "Nature is nature."

I glanced up at him and saw a hint of an amused twinkle in his steady eyes. He didn't see my glance. He was looking ahead toward the round-topped mountain. But I knew, then, that my last question had not been answered—that he was deliberately holding back whatever answer there might be . . .

The goddess of flames was burning as bright as if the night's darkness had been around her. The penetrating white of her forehead burned my eyes. She was rising slowly, her head was tilted upward, the beauty of her face held me.

She was not smiling. She did not extend her hand, and I had no fear, this time, that I would be drawn over the edge into the well of fire.

She was ready to talk with me, eager for me to catch the vibrations of her whispered words.

"Your friends," she said slowly, "have gone . . . They are in the storm" . . . It is no passing storm . . . for

them . . . You . . . are the one . . . who may help them . . . And you . . . are the one . . . who may help . . . your men . . ."

"Sure," I said. "If there's anything I can do, just tell me—"

"Beware of Cobert . . . He is scheming . . . Once many days ago . . . he communicated . . . with Thunder Splitter."

"How could that be?"

"Through the ledge . . . Cobert formed a bond . . . He is one . . . to betray . . . your friends . . . He would . . . sell them . . . Beware of him."

"Then the thing for me to do," I said, "is to go after him right away. What'll I do with him—bring him to you? Will you give him the works like you did those sand rats? You wouldn't refuse him, would you?"

Her whispered answers sounded awfully calm in contrast to all the uproar of a storming desert, not to mention my own excited outbursts.

"Bring him to me . . . when you can . . . I will wait."

"Between Wells and me we'll run the traitor down as quick as this storm—"

"Your friend Wells," came the whisper, "may never emerge . . . from *his* storm."

"Where is he?" I asked.

"To the south," said the goddess. For a moment the fine, white flames of her eyelids closed. Then shaking her head slowly, she said, "Just now . . . some wingmen . . . have captured him . . . They . . . have bound . . . his hands and feet . . . with cords . . . They are bearing him up . . . higher and higher . . . to join the tribe . . . flying above the blowing sand."

I turned and looked up into the foggy yellow sky. All I could see, other than the swirling storm, was the bright image of the flame goddess still linger-

ing in my eyes. The intense brightness had burned in so deep that I would keep on seeing her in my mind for many minutes.

But when I looked back into the fiery shaft she was gone. The fires burned dim under the swirling eddies of dust and sand, that spun everywhere before my eyes.

CHAPTER XXII

Into the Vortex

RATTLE WHISKERS, after depositing me at the pit of fire, had gone to try to find Orchid Wings and Wells, so he had missed out on my visit with the goddess.

Now, alone, I threaded my way down the smooth, unshaken side of the round-topped hill. Nowhere could I see any living thing. The dim outline of Green Tooth guided me on.

Where would I find the gang? How was Maxie faring against this fury? And Slim? Did they know that Cobert's traitorous mind was planning something more treacherous than earthquakes and avalanches? Where would I find Cobert?

So he would *sell* a friend of mine—or several of them! Of course he would. He would sell his own brother.

But in what sense did the goddess mean? Would he sell one of us as butchers might sell food? It was conceivable if he were selling to the voracious Thunder Splitter.

A ripping and a clattering of stone came from the Green Tooth pinnacle. I stopped, in defiance of the wave of blowing sand that was carrying me along. It was a sure bet that the towering spire over the tunnel entrances had come toppling down. That was Wells' tower. In the very top had been some sort of hiding place where he had

held forth many hours after his separation from us in those early days.

For a few seconds I saw clearly the greenish gray side of the peak. Yes, the pinnacle had shattered. The part near the top where we had entered the cinnamon roll tunnel so many times was now a heap of crushed rock. I wondered if the dirt didn't shake all the way down to the Hammerstein and McCorkle rivers.

So these cinnamon roll tunnels were also closed. Once their closing might have caught Maxie and me and the German professor. Now there was no telling whether anyone had been imprisoned. I thought of the clay water jug that Rattle Whiskers had hidden there the first time he ever picked me up.

Without Rattle Whiskers I was lost. The winds were growing more furious. Every winged creature must have tried for high altitudes by this time.

The wind carried me northward. I tried to follow around the base of the Green Tooth. The darkness was like the last of twilight, though it was only mid-afternoon. An occasional flash of lightning helped me to see.

Once I was sure I saw some human figures clinging to the side of the Green Tooth high above me. Another glimpse—they were climbing down—climbing, sliding, rolling. I tried to propel myself toward them. The hurricane winds carried me away.

I drifted, then, like a rowboat in an angry sea. The winds took me north, and west, and again south. I fell and bounced and rolled. A strange power was carrying me along like a leaf in a cyclone.

I passed over one of the shelters of the gang. For an instant I glimpsed Maxie clinging to a post of rock, his hair blowing, his eyes closed against the blasts of sand.

A LITTLE farther on I saw the dim outline of a long-legged figure that must have been Slim. He was fighting his way into the wind, and you could read his determination and his iron will in the lines of his bent-steel body.

On I went, carried along by this magic current of wind, skimming only three or four feet above the surface of the rocks and sand. Occasionally my feet would come down with a solid bump that would nearly break my back. But the jolt would bounce me back into the fury of the wind, and on I would go.

The caprices of this tornado included a whirl through the octagon. I saw heaps of uprooted yellow grass tumbling along. I caught sight of a metal helmet—that of the Greek who had struck this land unconscious and had furnished the latest feast. The helmet, caught loosely between rocks, was banging back and forth in the wind, ringing like a bell. The skull was in it.

Farther on I was rushed past a flopping shield, now sliding, now jumping over the octagon floor. That fighting Greek with the sword was racing after it, yelling defiantly against the howling winds, swinging his weapon at sand clouds or terrified rodents—or me, as he caught sight of me passing a dozen yards out of reach. But the last I saw of him he was far from overtaking his shield.

I bounced and scooted and flew, again to the north, now following the base of the eastern range.

Ahead of me I saw the German professor clinging to a harness that held two live wingmen. He had their talons bound. He was driving them. They were young boys, as jumpy as a team of panic-stricken horses. But in spite of their fright and frenzy, he was driving them in the direction he wanted to go.

They were moving toward the huge

black vortex of the storm—a column of twisting wind that might have been a screaming, spinning tower of smoke coursing northward over the flat desert. You might live a thousand years and never see a twister half so powerful or dangerous. Yet it was as plain as a lightning flash that this German professor was driving toward it deliberately.

LIKE it or not, I was heading for it too. The magic wings that had caught me in their grip were speeding me straight toward it.

I saw dead sand rats, I heard a squalling wing child tumbling along helplessly in a cloud of sand, I saw a dead husky with crushed wings. I saw uprooted bushes streaking through the sand. The only lucky living things in all this desert were the winged hosts that now hovered high above the storm. They—and I. Or was it more than luck that I hadn't been killed?

But my time was at hand. The tower of black smoke swirled closer and closer. The blackness was taking me in. The scream of spinning sands deafened me.

I was hurled down. To crash the surface at such speed would be sure death. *But there was no surface.* The very ground was in motion with me, everywhere around me.

Then I knew I was somehow falling through the very foundation of this desert world.

And praise be to St. Patrick, I was not alone! A strong pair of gray-brown wings were with me. Rattle Whiskers! His husky talons swung around my waist.

He was shouting something at me, but I couldn't hear a word. Soon the blackness was so thick I could no longer see him. Why didn't he let me fall free? Did he think it would be easier

for us to die together?

Somehow I kept breathing through the long weird hour of darkness. Sick from dizziness and fright, I kept telling myself, "I'm still alive. I'm still alive . . . This can't go on. Another swift round of this black vortex and some flying rock will get me sure. But I'm still alive . . . I'm still going down, down, down. Hang on, Rattle Whiskers, hang on!"

I doubt if he ever heard any of my wild soliloquies.

The blackness faded. We were floating down toward the earth. High overhead were dark, swirling clouds streaming down out of a wide expanse of opaque haze.

Toward the horizons the skies were deep blue, the same skies that one might see over Africa, America, or even Ireland. But that area of dull gray haze overhead must have been more than a layer of clouds across the zenith.

It must have been the desert of the damned. It had to be. Hadn't I just fallen through?

"Don't sunburn your throat," said Rattle Whiskers. "You might look the territory over and pick out a place you'd like to land."

"To the west of that sea coast, if you don't mind," I said.

CHAPTER XXIII

News on the Wing

AS THE cities along the coast rose into sharp outlines, I knew the architecture was American. I knew this must be the Atlantic seaboard rising toward us, deep blue, with white feathery lines of surf.

The conversation from there on down dealt me an awful setback. I was about to get my breathing back to normal, after having actually passed out for a

time during the descent. But what Rattle Whiskers now told me knocked the wind out of me again.

"Did you see the two wing boys that carried the German professor into the black whirl?" he asked.

"Yes, I saw them," I said. "Why did he need them?"

"For the same reason you needed me. This black whirl, as you see, has been your passage back to your own world. But you'd have had miles to fall without my wings to support you."

"Then that's why you dashed into it? To save me?"

"Yes. I knew I could go through and come out alive—on *this* side of the desert. I had done it once before."

"But did you want to come back to the earth?" I asked, growing more puzzled.

"If I could have kept you from going, I would have," said Rattle Whiskers. "But you were caught in the winds long before I could reach you. I think the goddess of white flames must have intended to send you back to the earth—I don't know why."

"She sent me?" I stammered. "Why?"

"On some mission, perhaps. *Knowing that you will return to the desert.*"

That was when my lungs began to feel like I had walked into a line of sledge hammers.

I looked down at the beautiful green countryside, then cast a sour glance at the whiskery face of my winged rescuer.

"Who says I'll go back?"

"Maybe I'm wrong," said Rattle Whiskers. "Maybe I shouldn't have followed you. Probably I *wouldn't* have if I had known that Orchid Wings was trapped."

"I don't understand."

"As we came through the black whirl," said Rattle Whiskers, "I passed a few words with the two boys who

were supporting the German. I think you were unconscious at the time. What they told me would have taken me right back to the desert if there had been enough power in my wings to get back. They said that the tunnels of the Green Tooth were sealed, closed by the land-slides."

"That's true," I said. "I saw the pinnacle shatter."

"Orchid Wings is trapped in there."

"Ye gods!" I gulped. "Alone?"

"I think so. Your friend Wells won't know about it. He had already been captured by Thunder Splitter's huskies. . . . What he'll face I'd hate to say."

"Then no one knows . . . about Orchid?"

"Franz Cobert and one or two others were seen near there."

I FELT my blood turn cold. "Cobert isn't to be trusted. He'd never lift a hand to rescue her. He—" broke off. With a horror that filled me to the fingertips I recalled the warning of the goddess.

"I very much fear," said Rattle Whiskers, "that Cobert will try to make a deal with Thunder Splitter, who is determined to destroy Orchid. What's more, Cobert may find it to his interest to offer your gang of comrades, one by one, for feasting purposes."

I was silent for the space of a few miles. We were down near the surface now, flying westward over bright roofs and green tree tops. You might think my heart would be jumping with joy to be back to a land where things grow green and you don't have to live on sand rats and desert berries.

But my heart couldn't jump for joy, because it was still in the desert. It was still with Wells, Slim, Maxie, and the gang—yes, and with poor Orchid Wings!

"How soon," I said, "can you take me back?"

Rattle Whiskers smiled as if he'd known it all along. Then he shook his head and began to answer in riddles. From what I made of his talk, it wasn't easy to get back. There were no scheduled return trips. We might have to wait for years.

"Our best chance," he said finally, "is to try to find the German professor again. He's sure to go to work on another gun. Unfortunately, you and I couldn't keep pace with his team of young wings. He steered them away from us as we were coming down through the haze. My eyes couldn't follow."

"We'll find him," I said, "if we have to comb every continent. We've got to get back."

"Much will happen before we can get back. All may be lost."

"I'll go back," I said, "if it's only to give Wells' bleached bones a decent burial."

"In a Green Tooth cavern beside the body of Orchid Wings would be an appropriate place," said Rattle Whiskers. "*They are husband and wife*, you know . . . That's a strange look you're giving me . . . Really, hadn't you guessed?"

I can't remember that I said anything. For some miles it was only Rattle Whiskers who talked.

"Don't you remember that night when the little tribal ceremony was held at the top of the Green Tooth—when we circled round and round until dawn—and your friend Maxie started to shoot, and fell in the sand—and Orchid Wings and Wells soared away to the north?"

Did I remember? Every detail had left an indelible impression.

"I know you must think it strange," Rattle Whiskers went on, "that a

winged girl like Orchid would fall in love with a human creature with clumsy legs and no wings. But his handicaps were no bar to their true love. He was so eager to understand the mysteries of the desert. And so ready to help her fight the ugly superstitions.

"That was why she had the courage to defy the whole tribe and risk the awful anger of Thunder Splitter. Because there was love between her and Wells from the start. . . . Now they will both pay. No miracle can save them."

"We'll go back," I repeated. "We'll find the German and go back."

I'VE been repeating that pledge every hour since. And Rattle Whiskers and I are hopping all over the country following clues in search of the professor.

That brings us up to date, I guess. Thanks a lot for listening. It's a great weight off my mind to get to tell all this to someone—in confidence, of course.

Toby McCorkle folded his hands back of his head, drew a deep breath, and closed his eyes. I, David Burton, who had listened to him recount this most fantastic yarn, had been deeply impressed by his sincerity.

"When you return to the desert, Mr. McCorkle," I said, "I want to go with you. Do you think it can be arranged?"

The little Irishman's eyes took on a pleased squint. He walked over to the window, thrust his head out into the rain-washed air, and called aloft.

"Did you hear that, Rattle Whiskers?"

"I heard everything," came the low easy voice of our unseen guest on the roof. "It can be arranged. If Mr. Burton is sure he wants to go."

To which I replied, "I'd go anywhere to see this girl, Orchid Wings—to con-

vince myself such a creature can be beautiful. But I do have one serious doubt. Suppose they kill Wells before we get there?"

Toby McCorkle, still standing at the window, held his questioning eyes on me. Absently he took the tray of empty dishes handed down through the darkness to him by a shining wet yellow talon.

"If they kill Wells at once," I pursued, "isn't it probable, Mr. McCorkle, that the tribe will then forgive and forget their grievances against Orchid Wings? Their change of heart will lead to her rescue, she will come back into the fold, and never again will she have anything to do with human beings. If so—"

"You're all wrong, Mr. Burton," said Toby McCorkle. "You don't know Orchid Wings. And you don't know Thundersplitter."

Then the low voice from the roof came again:

"There is something else—quite important—that you should both know . . . Wells and Orchid Wings are expecting a baby."

IT WAS nearly midnight and we three trespassers were almost ready. Toby McCorkle gave me a wink with his Irish eyes and another with the flashlight as we finished tying the big, red-faced German professor in his bed.

"He's a peaceful sleeper," I observed.

"Always has been," Toby whispered.

"You should have heard his pleasant snore echo through the caves at the desert."

"Never to happen again, I hope. This ought to discourage him from going back."

"He'll blow a fuse," said McCorkle.

"But he's a hard man to discourage. All I hope is, he'll not wake up and start bellowing."

"All set?" said Rattle Whiskers.

"All but this." I scribbled a bold heading on our farewell note.

"BEWARE! IF YOU LEAVE THIS ROOM TOO SOON YOU WILL BE KILLED!"

I switched the center light on. The sleeping professor wrinkled his nose. He tried to turn over but couldn't budge. His lips parted and he began snoring gently.

McCorkle pocketed his flashlight. He motioned to Rattle Whiskers to come closer. The wingman's huge gray-brown wings rustled, his talons clicked lightly on the bare floor. He and McCorkle bent over the bed to read the note, as I now pinned it to the string from the center light.

McCorkle, remembering that Rattle Whiskers wasn't familiar with the printed word, read in a low voice:

"Beware! If you leave this room too soon you will be killed! You will hear the first explosion at midnight. But don't leave your bed until you hear the second—at one minute after.

"The first blast will be the gun. You built it to send yourself and your band of Nazi thugs to the desert beyond the earth—to steal the land. When it goes off we will be on our way—to save the people. Sorry we can't take time to pay you for the passage.

"The second blast, one minute later, may shake you out of your ropes but it won't hurt you. It is a time bomb in the basement. It will simply blow up your laboratory and destroy your gun so you won't take a silly notion to follow us. Too bad to mess up your nice equipment—but take our advice and don't make any more! You'll be safer here on the earth.

(Signed) Toby McCorkle
David Burton."

"That does it," said McCorkle. "We should have your claw print on it, Rat-

tle Whiskers, to make it official."

The wingman was nervous. "We'd better get to the gun."

He led the way down the stairs to the laboratory room. The German professor had been much too trusting, thinking no one would find him out in this deserted mid-western town. This building had once been a community recreation hall, and the basement basketball court had contained a solid concrete floor—just the thing the professor required as a base for his chromium-bright, barrel-shaped gun.

At midnight we shot off in a cloud of pink smoke.

We trusted that the German professor wouldn't follow—and he didn't.

CHAPTER XXIV

Orchid Wings Doomed

HERE was the moment I had looked forward to. As a writer eager for new settings for adventure stories this lost desert would be my dish.

A colorful landscape? It was terrific. I blinked my eyes against the riot of color. McCorkle had told me about this, but he hadn't done it justice. On first glance I had the sensation of opening my eyes in a beautiful color movie—a veritable fantasia of lofty sun-lined spires of stone. Several of these abrupt mountain peaks were ornamented with patches of pale green vegetation. Surrounding the bases of every towering mountain were huge piles of broken stones—purple, red, orange, blue, slate, yellow, even crystal white—slabs that had been shaken down by the recent earthquake.

In all directions from the bases of these colored peaks extended the endless floor of bright gold sand, bordered by blue shadows that stretched in flat, jagged patches eastward from the

mountains.

"No time for mooning," McCorkle said. "Into the heavy bushes first. Did the fall hurt you? You look dazed."

"It's the scenery," I said. "It knocked me for a row of ten pins."

I followed McCorkle into the thick gray-green brush that smelled like perfumed sage. Here we were to wait through the remainder of the afternoon while Rattle Whiskers sailed off to see how the land lay.

We had come prepared. McCorkle and I each wore camouflage—a lot of whiskers, and a pair of artificial wings strapped to our shoulders, fixed to spread when we lifted our elbows.

The first minutes after landing on this desert could be dangerous—yes, fatal. To be seen as human beings might bring down an immediate mass attack. On McCorkle's previous arrival, several months before, two of his fellow soldiers had been seized for a ceremonial feast, and their white bones had been picked clean.

"Rattle Whiskers got around in a hurry," I observed. "Here he comes." I started up to wave.

"Get down!" McCorkle snapped. "That's not Rattle Whiskers."

"He's got a whiskery face, and gray-brown wings, and he's coming—"

"There are dozens of wingmen with whiskers and gray-brown wings. But we don't want to meet them."

The wingman came and went, never seeing us.

Every male wingman I saw that afternoon, whether he flew far or near, reminded me of Rattle Whiskers. And every female that happened to fly past made me ask, "Could that be Orchid Wings?"

"She's more beautiful than that," McCorkle would say, "if she's still alive."

He tried to appear calm, but his

quick eyes were on the jump, trying to take in everything. Many weeks had passed since the storm had hurled him out of this lost land, and he was literally starved to know what had happened in the meantime.

Well, fortunately, some very revealing gossip came our way during our afternoon's wait. That ledge of rock about twelve feet above our heads became the chance meeting place of some wingwomen.

FIVE of them came together in the air, greeted, and then circled over our heads, never seeing us. They alighted with clicking talons, kicking a few pebbles down on our heads. Then they began to talk.

"Which one was Orchid?" I whispered.

McCorkle gave me a look of disgust. "Just be patient. You'll know when you see her. One look and you'll be out of breath."

"Out already, thank you," I said. "Those two young females weren't bad. Pretty hair, graceful curves—"

"The desert's full of them."

"I think I'm going to like the desert."

McCorkle quieted me. He wanted to hear what the three older females were talking about up there. I listened too, for he had been teaching me the wingman language during the past few weeks. Now and then I could catch a word.

Then the chattering voices retreated almost out of hearing. So McCorkle tried to climb a niche in the wall to eavesdrop.

"Give me a boost, Burton," he said. "Let me stand on your shoulder."

He did better than that. He leaned against the wall and stood smack on the top of my head. And knocked dust down on my false whiskers. And gave me that, "Sssh! Sssh!"

"What'll I do if someone sees me?" I whispered.

"Your wings are spread, aren't they?" he retorted. "You're standing knee deep in bushes. Just pretend you're a wingman and don't do anything silly to attract attention."

"You're standing on my head," I said. "Your left sandal is smashing my left ear."

"When you learn the language I'll let you stand on my head. Now—*quiet!*"

In a few minutes he whispered again. "They're talking about Orchid! . . . She's still alive!" Then, later, "Everybody's excited about her . . . She's been imprisoned by Thunder Splitter and the tribe."

"I thought she was trapped in the Green Tooth tunnel."

"She was—but Franz Cobert sold her to Thunder Splitter—"

"Sold her?"

"For a price. I didn't get it. Sssh."

What he was hearing must have made him uncomfortable. He was doing a tap dance on my skull. He tried to climb higher and succeeded in hooking an elbow over a bit of rocky shelf.

"Did you get that?" he called in a low voice.

What did he mean—the rock he knocked down on my noggin, or the rapid jabber that echoed down over the ledge?

"They're going to sacrifice Orchid," he said. "But before she dies there'll be some sort of public exhibition—to disgrace her. S-s-sh!"

He didn't need to s-s-sh me. The hard news was enough to silence me. I felt that I knew Orchid Wings. What McCorkle had told me enabled me to think of her not as a creature with a peculiar body, but a person with a very courageous heart, willing to risk her life for her convictions.

So there I stood, forgetting that my

left ear was being flattened against my skull, because what I felt for Orchid went a lot deeper. It was the worst time in the world for anyone to scare me out of my weighty thoughts.

"Whoo-ookee!"

The shrill female voice called to me out of the air. I whirled to see a winged female swoop past within ten yards of me.

"Whoo-ookee!" she called again, and gave me a backward glance as if she expected me to follow her. Those darned artificial wings of mine! I'd been mistaken for a wingman!

The shock must have shaken the legs out from under me. Staring after that wing girl—and she was easy on the eyes—I discovered that I had dropped down in the bushes and hidden like a child afraid of being kidnapped.

A hiss brought me out of my absent-minded retreat.

"Shades of St. Patrick, and how do you think I get down?"

Poor McCorkle was hanging from his elbow, flopping like a fish.

"You've got wings," I said. "Fly!"

CHAPTER XXV

Midnight Alarm

THAT night Rattle Whiskers returned and he took us, one at a time, to the camp of Slim and Maxie. Good sociable fellows. They were darned glad to shake hands with someone from back home.

"Wings for camouflage!" Slim laughed. "Terrific ideal! And such whiskers! Didn't happen to bring any extra shaving soap, did you? I've borrowed the last of Franz Cobert's."

McCorkle had come loaded with soaps and razor blades, matches, first aid equipment, and a host of other desert luxuries. Maxie said he wasn't sure

which he was gladder to see, Corky or the supplies.

Whitey Everett moved in from the darkness stealthily. He stood at a distance from the fire until Slim told him to come on up and see who was here.

Whitey made you feel uneasy, as if he were aware that enemies were all around, ready to pounce. He looked suspiciously at the artificial wings that McCorkle and I had shaken off and piled in the corner of the cave. He stared at me suspiciously.

"We've brought lots of news from the earth," I volunteered. "Anyone want to know how the state elections went? Or who won the series?"

"We've got plenty of news here to hold us," said Maxie. "Captures and feasts and plans for executions. Have you heard about Orchid Wings and Wells? The whole desert's heated up over that affair."

"Or have you heard," said Slim, "about our friend Marco Polo Smith?"

"Don't tell it," said Whitey Everett. "Don't talk about it."

There was a strained silence. Someone kicked a clump of dry roots on the fire, and by the flare-up you could see the horror-lighted eyes of Everett.

They didn't talk any more about Marco Polo, but later McCorkle got the lowdown from Maxie and passed it on to me. Marco Polo had gone the way of Charrington and Biddle.

Thunder Splitter had captured him and made a feast of him through the lowdown scheming of Franz Cobert. What Cobert was making out of these deals the others didn't know. But they were out for him, ready to hang him or shoot him on sight.

"Cobert and Marco Polo had quarreled over some trifle," Maxie explained. "Maybe it was a match or knife. Then—of all the dirty lowdown tricks—Cobert yelled over to Marco

Polo and Kid Smith early one morning in a friendly voice that he'd caught something that he wanted to show them. They thought it was a gesture toward burying the hatchet. They trotted over—and walked into a trap—a pitfall covered with brush and sand. Marco Polo went down. Kid Smith missed the pit by inches. Cobert tried to push him in, and they fought. Just then old Thunder Splitter and four huskies came over—

"By chance?" McCorkle asked anxiously. "Or—"

"Prearrangement—no question about it. They snatched Marco Polo. The Kid fought free. Cobert shot at him and missed, and the Kid got back to us and reported the whole nasty affair."

"And Cobert?"

"He hasn't shown his face in these parts, and he'd better not."

The fire died away. Slim volunteered to keep watch the first half of the night. McCorkle and I weren't sleepy, so we stayed up and visited with him.

Slim was the homely, level headed, hard-hitting man that I had pictured from McCorkle's description. He knew practically everything that went on between the gang and the wingmen. He knew other things that he would seemingly have no way of finding out—until I recalled that he and the mysterious Fire Goddess had had a sympathetic understanding from the first.

WE DUG into the fascinating question, Where *was* this desert? How could it be? If it were floating near the earth, why had no astronomers ever reported it? What did the Fire Goddess mean—"of the earth but not on the earth?"

These were the sort of speculations that primitive men must have made about the sun, moon, and stars. Until

some of the mighty laws of the universe were known, men could wonder and wonder endlessly, only to sink deeper in the mire of their ignorance.

And so it was with this world—a world that seemed so close to our own earth when we made passage from one to the other.

"On thing I would bet on," said McCorkle. "The Goddess of White Flames must have received echoes of some earth thoughts. She must have felt the weight of the calculations by that crusty old German professor when he was doping out this place. So she sent Rattle Whiskers down to earth to check up."

"If you men put so much faith in this goddess," I suggested, "Why don't you get her to help get Wells and Orchid Wings out of their jam?"

Slim answered slowly. "Don't ever doubt it, I've kept in touch with her. She's doing what she can. The last tip she gave was to send Kid Smith down the valley to a certain spring to see what he could see."

"What did he see?"

"We're waiting for him to come back," said Slim.

This had a familiar ring. Several times during the conversation earlier in the evening Whitey Everett had broken in with a question about Kid Smith. And back of his every spoken question there seemed to be an unspoken one. "Have the wingmen got the Kid?"

At midnight McCorkle told Slim to go to bed, that he and I would attend watch until dawn.

"Since Burton isn't used to this beat he'd better take to the cool waves in the daytime."

"I'll turn in, then," said Slim. "But be sure to wake me the minute the Kid comes. If he isn't back by morning—"

He's back," called a youngish voice from down the path. "Wake 'em up, Slim! Roll 'em out! We're on our

way to the Octagon. Grab your weapons. Let's go!"

All this was shouted before I heard the beat of a single footstep. Then in the darkness I saw the bulky form of young Smith being dropped from the talons of a wingman swooping low over the path.

Slim yelled the alarm to Maxie and Whitey Everett. There was a confusion of talk and motion. Someone stirred the fire and lighted a torch so that everyone could check over his weapons. Three winged huskies stood by ready to convoy a part of us to the scene of action.

"More knives than I ever saw around here," McCorkle said, as some passed him a crude iron sword. "That Greek air-slasher must have started something."

Slim put a stone hatchet in my hands. It had a flat blade turned like an adze. "For close-in fighting," he said.

"And don't forget," said Maxie, "that a chopped off wing can turn an attack quicker than a pistol bullet through a heart."

"Are we after wings?" said McCorkle. "Or Cobert?"

"A mob of wings," said the Kid. "But it was Franz Cobert that touched them off."

Slim took command. He ordered Maxie, McCorkle and Whitey to ride ahead to a designated point. The huskies would come back for the rest of us on the second trip.

And so, within ten minutes after the alarm, we were mobilized for some sort of battle and on our way.

CHAPTER XXVI

Magic Knife Thrower

I TAPPED the stone axe lightly against the palm of my hand and

reflected upon the pride my stone-age grandpappy must have felt to know that he possessed the last word in armaments. I hung it from my belt, and the darned handle smacked me on the hip with every step.

Slim and the Kid were good hikers, and the sand underfoot crowded them along as much as it bogged me down.

Once I stopped to empty my shoes, and got yards behind, and came up panting and breathless, and a bit scared, too. It would be easy to lose them on such a dark night.

As we hiked along, Slim quizzed the Kid on all that had happened at the spring, and again I gathered that the instructions of the Fire Goddess were in the back of his mind.

"You say that the wingmen had meant to hold the execution ceremony in ten days," said Slim, "but something forced them to change their plan?"

"That's right," said the Kid. "And that something was Franz Cobert, as sure as my name is Smith."

"Did you see Cobert?"

"If I had—I'd have wrung his neck. Only you told me to go to observe, not to fight. Well, it was his voice. You can't go wrong on that accent."

"Where was he hiding?"

"He couldn't have been more than a stone's throw from the mouth of the spring. His voice, you see, came *right out of the spring*."

"That's possible," said Slim thoughtfully.

"It sounded impossible to me," said the Kid, "but there it was, rolling out in wavery, hollow tones along with the gurgle of the water. He talked their language, and he talked plain."

"Do you recall his words?"

"He said, 'Listen, wingmen. Stand up and listen.' Then the four of them—Thunder Splitter's four favorite huskies—jumped back from the spring,

too surprised to say anything. They looked at each other and they bent down and peered into the opening in the rock. It's about a foot in diameter and it flows just half full."

"I know. Go on."

"Then the voice said, 'Listen closely. This is Cobert. I have counselled the wingmen before. Now I am passing on a message from the Flash Death. Tell Thunder Splitter that he must not delay the executions. Tomorrow at dawn your prisoners must die.' Well, that stunned them. They began arguing among themselves. The plans couldn't be changed, they thought. But Cobert's voice grew sharper. They *would* change it. 'Remember,' he said, 'Cobert's magic knife hangs over you.'"

"Magic knife?" said Slim. He hadn't heard of any such thing before. "What kind of game is he working?"

"Sounds to me," I volunteered, "as if he's trying to get the drop on the whole tribe. He's buying himself a slice of Thunder Splitter's Flash Death racket."

"Wait till I give you the payoff," said the Kid. "These four huskies looked around just to make sure there wasn't any knife hanging over them. Then one of them sneered and tried to pass the whole thing off as a bunch of funny noises out of the spring, with no meaning. But the voice of Cobert came again, an awful roar. 'The magic knife hangs over you all the time. *See it?*'"

"Then—*zing!* A big iron dagger came shooting out of the bushes a few yards up the slope. It struck into the ground at the edge of the spring and splashed wet sand on their feet."

"Ye gods!" Slim groaned. "Was he in those bushes?"

"No, they went over and looked. They found something, but it wasn't anything they understood. The point is, the whole hoax worked. These four

superstitious huskies tarried just long enough to decide that there must be executions at the next sunrise. They shouted their decision into the mouth of the spring to forestall any more knives. Then they flew off to fix the deal with Thunder Splitter."

"And then you dashed home to give us the warning?" said Slim.

"First I investigated the *how* of that flying knife," said the Kid. "It came from a homemade catapult, made out of these scrubby orange-barked trees. I saw that much, then I raced for camp. I caught a ride over the last mile when I bumped into one of Orchid Wings' family."

SLIM had several more questions before he was satisfied he'd got the full benefit of the Kid's scouting venture. Between them they decided that Franz Cobert must have tapped the subterranean stream a few yards back from the spring and found that he could make his voice carry through the narrow tunnel. The catapult, too, had taken careful planning. Cobert was sparing no pains to put his magic over with the major tribe of wingmen.

Our chances to throw a monkey wrench or a stone ax into the execution ceremony looked slender to me. The Kid and Slim counted forces and we were as badly outnumbered as a squad of cops against an army.

In addition to the gang—six of us, counting me, not counting Wells—there were also Rattle Whiskers and two other elderly wingmen, three young huskies, and one elderly female—all of whom had stuck by Orchid Wings from the first. They were the relatives, by blood or ties stronger than blood. They were the Green Tooth family, the same party that had conducted the wedding ceremony for Wells and Orchid Wings. If we could have found that fighting

Greek we might have converted him to our cause. But from all reports he was a lone wolf who trusted no living creature.

Against us there might be a thousand native wingmen, and yet we couldn't be sure that all of them had fallen for the spell-binding leadership of the flesh-hungry Thunder Splitter.

A flutter of wings through the darkness announced that the three friendly huskies were returning for us—or so we thought.

"Over here!" Slim called.

You could see the dark patches of wings against the bright stars. They followed down along the slope of a hill to a point a quarter of a mile back of us. Slim called again. This time he got an answering, "Whoo-eel!"

"They're ahead of schedule," said the Kid. "I thought we'd make the ridge a couple miles farther on before they got back." Then he called, "Hey-ooo! Up this way!"

"Listen!" Slim said. "Voices!"

I almost stopped breathing. The night's sounds were the trifling little noises of sand rats playing through the bushes. The low rumble of the wingmen voices, barely carrying to us, broke off. Then the light flapping of wings came toward us again. Slim started back to meet them. He called again, uncertainty in his voice.

He was only a few yards away from us when they came to him. I saw their dark forms swooping down swiftly. There were sounds of a scuffle. Grunting, snarling, striking of blows.

"Your swords!" Slim yelled, and his outcry told us everything. These weren't our friendly huskies. They were Cobert's stooges. All three or four of them had pounced on Slim.

I jerked my pistol and fired some shots over the top of the fight. The Kid whipped out his blade as he bounded

back through the darkness. I followed his lead. But an awful scare came over me. How could you do anything with a pistol or a knife when you couldn't see who was who?

Before I reached Slim a winged husky came down on me. The thud of his closed claws caught me across the side of the head. I went sprawling in the sand.

I BOUNDED up. My stone-ax was swinging as I whirled to meet my adversary. I swung, it was like whipping shadows. Flutter and squawk and the click of leaping talons were my only guide.

I smacked a wing. I felt it give against my blow like a cushion. Then an open talon cut past my head. I ducked, but one of those steel toes ripped a thin burning streak across the back of my neck.

For an instant I was scared—so darned scared I almost broke and ran. But that shaky stone-ax was still swinging, and suddenly it struck a solar plexus.

"Fwooff!" the wingman cried. Yes, I had landed one. Suddenly I was filled with the spirit of fight. That "Fwooff!" had done something for me. Now I was throwing blows like a madman fighting a mob of bats.

Then I stopped, for there was no sense pounding the darkness. The wingman was gone.

Gone—but he had got my pistol. How did he know to do that?

The fight was still on a little farther down the slope. The Kid was yelling to me to find the blade that had been knocked out of his hands.

Then, before I knew what a serious turn the fight had taken, pistol shots rang out. They came from over our heads, from these three or four huskies taking to their wings.

I flopped to the ground. Two shots hit so close I felt the earth jump.

Then I heard Slim cry out.

"Oh! The devils got me!"

CHAPTER XXVII

Executions to the East

WE were whipped—whipped badly—and it wasn't easy to take.

They had whipped us because the dark that had made us cautious had made them bold.

They had whipped us because I was green, not seasoned to the desert ways, must less to fighting. My whole being rebelled at this violence.

They had whipped us because that poison rat, Franz Cobert, had instructed them to gang up on us in the dark, mob us one at a time, *and take our pistols.*

Yes, they had had lessons from him, no question about that.

So now they went sailing off, slap-happy over their new prizes that belched fire and spat deadly bullets. They soared around, shooting pistols until the last bullet was spent. At no time did they seem to be aiming at anything.

But they had got Slim—got him in the side below his right lung. He lay there moaning.

It was a good thing that Maxie knew something about first aid. I was too mad to control myself. I tramped around in circles, cursing, wishing to high heaven that those diabolical huskies would come back. But I never supposed they would—at least not so soon.

I stumbled over the Kid's lost knife quite by chance. I picked it up, weighed it in my hand, slashed at the air.

Oh, for a chance at one of those wings with this! Five minutes later

that chance came. Rattle Whiskers swooped over from the south calling to us. Then his call took on a different tone. He wasn't alone up there. One of the huskies was winging back to head him off.

They fought and rolled and came my way—and I ran to them—slipped in close—caught the sure sounds of the faithful old wingman's painful grunts and gasps—knew that the husky was on top.

I saw Rattle Whiskers roll free for a moment—heard his low muttering voice. The young husky jumped to attack again, and the sounds told me that he seized a stone in one of his talons. He took three jumps toward the rolling form, and the stone clacked heavily against the ground, *Thump, thump, thump!*

I rushed in as the form of the husky took the final leap toward Rattle Whiskers. I swung the iron blade, backed it with every ounce of my strength.

Clush!

Feathers, blood, and flesh—and a low groan of a dying wingman. I drew my knife out of the middle of the husky's back, wiped it on the severed wings.

Rattle Whiskers rolled out from under the dead, bleeding heap.

"Did the stone get you?" I said, much too excited to know what I was saying.

"It missed me farther than your knife," Rattle Whiskers muttered. "It's a good thing you're no stouter. You'd have cut us both in two."

SLIM and the Kid made me go on with Rattle Whiskers. The job before us was to get ourselves moved to the east range where the executions would take place. And every man or wingman of us must know what had taken place here tonight. They must know that Cobert would be lurking somewhere near the execution ground

with his voice tricks ready—also his knife throwing machine. For Slim was sure that two of the huskies had stopped to pick up some object after they had finished their pistol-firing spree.

"Tell Maxie and the others," said Slim, "that Cobert's game is to clean us humans off the desert. He's pushing this execution of Wells because he thinks the rest of us will be easy."

"But what is his game?" I asked dubiously. "He's a human too. Won't the wingmen deal with him sooner or later?"

"He's intending to make himself their master."

"How do you know?" said Rattle Whiskers.

"Through her—the Goddess."

Slim's voice was low, almost reverent. His arm extended toward something we couldn't see. The Kid tried to make him lie down, but he was mumbling half-audible words. The Goddess of White Flame must have been there—to him—a phantom of darkness.

"I think I saw her," Rattle Whiskers said to me as we flew away.

Now we assembled at the east mountains. It was not quite dawn as we found our way down into the mountain tunnel whose rock openings would serve as windows toward the probable scenes of execution.

Maxie and McCorkle and Whitey were quietly excited over the message I brought from Slim.

"So Cobert means to kill us off, one by one. He thinks he can capitalize on the wingmen's superstitions."

"And even work Thunder Splitter's Flash Death gag on Thunder Splitter himself," I said.

"He'll have to play a clever hand to take in a hoaxer like Thunder Splitter," said Maxie skeptically. "Old Thunder Puss is a clever strategist. Look how quick he shifted the place of execution

from the Octagon to this east range."

"Yes—why?" I asked.

"Because Cobert had tried to call both the time and the place. To play safe Thunder Splitter changed the place."

"Then Cobert outsmarted him, by guessing he'd change it. It's a cinch Cobert will have a better chance to work his tricks from this set-up than at the Octagon. I'd bet a sand rat he's in one of these caves right now, setting up his knife throwing machines."

"He is," said Whitey, whose nervous eyes never missed the most minute hint of danger. "I saw a fresh shoe track in the dust as we came down. It was Cobert's, I'm positive."

I remembered now that Whitey, bearing one of the lights through the tunnels a few minutes ago, had stopped to examine something. So there we had it—and it all fit into a perfect jigsaw. Those murderous huskies who had lifted our guns were already kowtowing to Cobert as the power above Thunder Splitter. They had attacked us at his command. They had brought him here. He, like ourselves, was waiting in one of these black chambers, armed to the teeth, looking out on the slope where the whole population of wingmen would gather.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Blood Red Dawn

DAWN burst over the land, a blood red dawn.

The wingmen gathered—males, females, old and young, all feverish with the excitement of the anticipated execution.

Soon Thunder Splitter and a squadron of his huskies flew in, circled the multitude, and alighted on a level shelf of rock that had outcropped like a

platform through the gentle slope.

As their formation broke and spread into two winged lines, we could see the two prisoners—Wells bound, hand and foot, and the beautiful Orchid Wings bound, wing and talon.

They lay helpless on the ground until Thunder Splitter ordered huskies to lean them against the stone wall where all could see them.

Then a hush came over the crowd and the ceremony began.

Thunder Splitter recited the crimes of Orchid Wings.

"She has defied the authorities. She has cried out against the feasts which I have kept in honor of the Flash Death.

"She has violated the customs of marriage, by taking a mate who has no wings. If she were allowed to live to give birth to his child the Flash Death would surely punish the whole tribe of us for allowing such a child to be born. Our race is proud of its wings. We must never let any unwinger strain begin among us.

"We know that these crimes are his as well as hers. He shall die first. *He shall die by her hand.*"

A slight murmur went over the crowd.

Orchid Wings' eyes were red from a night of crying. Her face was at once beautiful and savage. To look at her, no one would doubt that she might kill. She might even be capable of feeding upon human flesh. But regardless of what Nature had written in her boldly beautiful face, I knew that she had fought her way up two steps on the ascent to civilization.

She had become a bitter enemy of the human feast.

She had put aside all racial prejudice in favor of choosing her mate on the basis of his true quality of character.

Two bold steps—and for them she had earned three deaths, one for Wells, one for herself—and one for her un-

born child.

A husky cut the ropes that bound her talons. The wings were left tied. She was handed a stone hatchet, one very much like the one I had lost in my night's encounter.

She advanced toward Wells. The morning light was in his face. She leaned close to him and they seemed to be embracing, even though his hands were tied.

YES, they were spiritually in each other's arms in that moment. And there must have been those among the thousand spectators whose hearts beat in sympathy. The stone ax dropped from her talon.

Thunder Splitter might have held off barking until they had had a moment together. His bark must have jarred on many a wingman's ear.

"On with the killing. The Flash Death is impatient. Do you want him to beset us with another earthquake?"

Orchid Wings turned slowly to face Thunder Splitter, and the curl of her lips made a cynical answer. Not a spoken word, but many wingmen must have understood.

She *seemed* to be saying, "Flash Death! Who believes that the Flash Death had anything to do with that awful storm? It just came—and you tried to claim it—to blame it on me! I don't believe it!"

There may have been a hundred or more whispers to this effect, as the wingmen caught the meaning of her smile. For it was a fact that such whispers had been extant among some wingmen ever since the quake. Now you could hear the low, sullen murmur.

Thunder Splitter heard, and he tore into an unrehearsed speech which was very nearly an outburst of rage. He cut short, then, and for a tense moment everything was silent.

Then McCorkle did it. He cupped his hands and called, in the wingman language:

"The Flash Death commands you to let these people go."

You should have heard the stir that caused. Maybe the rear two thirds of the spectators didn't hear, but you could tell that the message was being relayed back in a hurry.

And you could tell something, too, from the curious hint of a smile that touched Wells' lips. He had recognized the good Irish voice of Toby McCorkle.

Thunder Splitter and the huskies hadn't. They went into an excited conference, in which you can bet your life the huskies were talking fast to convince Thunder Splitter that they hadn't got their wires crossed on the earlier message at the spring.

Thunder Splitter was shaking his head. This hoax wasn't going to get by him. He and his officials cast anxious glances along our shadowed ledge. But they weren't looking in the right direction to see us, so McCorkle yelled again, "No executions!"

At the same moment Maxie let fly with a big iron knife. The thing whizzed through the air and fell at Thunder Splitter's feet. He raised his eyebrows. He stood like a statue. His gaze came up slowly. That might have clinched our point, but—

ANOTHER voice sang out from somewhere around the gentle curve of our ledge of rock windows—Franz Cobert's voice.

"Execute them at once! . . . Now! . . . Don't delay for one more breath of time . . . Now . . . Now!!!"

Then a knife sped toward the wall where Wells and Orchid Wings stood. It sped, not as if thrown, but as if shot from a gun. Damned accurate, that knife throwing mechanism. Orchid

Wings jumped back. The blade passed between her and Wells, banged against the wall, clattered to the ground. The crowd gasped.

All of which aroused the Irish in Toby McCorkle. He cut loose with a weird hollow which, resounding throughout our cavern, must have sounded like a general announcement of doom to the whole desert.

"*Whoo-ooo!* Does Thunder Splitter obey Flash Death? Or does he listen to the squeaks of sand rats! *No executions, I say. No executions!*"

Then we hurled knives, hatchets, stones—anything we could get our hands on. It was a veritable battery of weapons, none of which hit anything. But my stone ax made Thunder Splitter jump, and a flying rock made him jump farther. He drew himself up defiantly, and spread his wings in a gesture of great power, as if no more missiles would make him move a step. And then a flying knife blade shot past his wing tip so close it would have taken a camera to tell whether he lost the tip.

All of which put the whole crowd in a terrible uproar. What did this mean? Would such a dignified god as Flash Death quarrel with himself from different ends of the hill cave? No, this wasn't Flash Death. It was a sham demonstration of power. It must be the work of the humans!

I'll bet every one of the thousand winged spectators were shouting by now, crying down this hoax—or in some cases yelling an alarm—yelling to look out for the prisoners.

For in that wild moment of pandemonium Orchid Wings must have closed her yellow claws over one of the fallen knives.

Suddenly her wings spread, she caught up Wells, she leaped into the air.

Swift as a dart she shot past our eyes

—up and up—to the west.

Instantly a flock of huskies were after her. The flap of their wings blew dust through our rock windows as they took off.

"Saint Patrick help us!" McCorkle groaned. "She can't fly him across to the west. One pair of wings—two lives—no, three! Saint Patrick, help—*oh-oh!*"

She dropped him.

CHAPTER XXIX

What Curse Upon This Race?

HE FELL—and there was Rattle Whiskers flying in from the west—flying under her—timing his strokes like a trapeze artist. That move had been planned, anyone could tell. It couldn't have just happened.

Out of the air Rattle Whiskers caught Wells. His strong wing bounced with the impact, then he shot over the heads of the oncoming huskies—shot eastward toward the top of this mountain whose cinnamon roll tunnels concealed us.

Ten minutes later we knew that Orchid had outwinged all pursuers. The confusion created by that criss-cross play had left her with a clear field of escape.

And ten minutes later Wells, pale and perspiring but smiling, was escorted by Rattle Whiskers into our rocky chamber.

The first thing he said was, "Did she get away?"

"Like an American bomber," said McCorkle. "She'll hide herself in the west range till dark."

Wells managed to grin. Absently he rubbed his cut wrists, exercised his lame arms. Then he stopped, staring out at the crowd.

"What paralyzed them? I thought

they'd turn on each other and have a free-for-all."

"They started to," said Maxie.

"Then they saw something coming over the ridge," said McCorkle. "It froze them—everyone of them, even old Thunder Splitter. Look at him gazing across—"

"With his mouth open, like someone had socked him in the gizzard," said Maxie.

The huskies jostled Thunder Splitter's shoulders and shook him into action. They fell in at the rear of a procession that was slowly forming—one thousand pairs of wings strong.

They moved eastward, up the mountain slope, so slowly you'd have thought they were a funeral procession. They forgot they had wings. Their colored wings rustled lightly. You could hear the thousands of clicking claws like the tapping of tiny hailstones all over the mountainside. But you heard no voices.

They moved in a body as the children of Hamlin must have moved when the Pied Piper called to them.

At the crest of the ridge, bright like a million tiny woven strands of incandescence against the morning's cobalt sky, towered the solitary figure of the Goddess.

She was moving slowly along the ridge—beckoning them to follow—beckoning with her blazing silver wings.

They followed. We watched them gather before her as she took her station near a slender spire of rock.

That spire might have been placed by a landscape gardener. On either side of it the ridge cupped to form a shallow U. From the lay of the land we could see that the right U led toward the valley of the Octagon. The left U swung back to the northeast, toward the peak in which we were hiding, and the white valleys still farther east.

"Listen!" Wells said. "That's her

voice. She's whispering!"

WE WERE too far away to see her facial expressions. And if, as she talked, there was a magnetic drawing that held her audience hypnotized, we did not feel it in a physical sense. But we heard. The whisper carried down over the half-mile slope and breathed through our cavern window as intimately as if we had been in a small auditorium with magic acoustics.

"Have the centuries passed . . . so swiftly," she was saying, "that you have forgotten . . . how you came here? . . . And why you stayed?"

At once we forgot everything; she caught our most intense attention. Yes, even Whitey must have relaxed his nervous vigil for once—and well he might, for he had seen Franz Cobert sneak out of an adjoining chamber as soon as the crowd had turned its back, to slip off in another direction in the broad daylight. In perfect safety we listened. And those weird whispers floated down in clearly spaced words—the words of the wingmen.

If I missed some of the phrases McCorkle repeated them in English. And so the revealing message came slowly—yet striking the multitude with the impact of an earthquake:

"You think . . . that you are here . . . as a race *damned* . . . *damned* for the sins of your forefathers . . . damned by an evil god . . . called Flash Death . . . But this is not so."

I wondered if Thunder Splitter didn't hide his head under his wing at that. The Fire Goddess tossed her head of flowing platinum hair. There was an attitude of kindness in the way she extended an open wing as she went on:

"If any sins have placed a curse upon you . . . they are these widespread sins . . . of pettiness . . . of quarreling . . . of greediness . . . Some of

you . . . are grasping . . . for new power . . . Some of you are hard . . . intolerant . . . saturated with hate . . . consumed by appetites . . . and you hide your meanness . . . behind laws and customs . . . which you blame on this long-suffering god . . . Flash Death.

"But that is not *why* you are here . . . It is rather the reason . . . that you are *unhappy* here . . . These stupid sins weigh down upon you . . . You even choose leaders . . . who bind them upon your wings . . .

"I tell you these things . . . so you will know . . . that you may throw off the ideas that damn you."

The silence almost rocked the hills.

Wells whispered, "That's exactly what Orchid has been preaching to them."

"Sounds like a revolution," said McCorkle.

"There's a chance," said Wells eagerly. "The time's ripe. A lot of those wings are gathering up for a rebellion this very minute. We can help swing it, men—you four and Slim and the Kid—"

Our expressions betrayed something unpleasant. Wells took us in sharply.

"Or aren't you with me?" he said.

"Sure," said McCorkle. "Don't ever question that. If our faces slipped, it was on account of your mentioning Slim. He had a jackpot of hard luck last night. Bullet from one of Cobert's pet huskies having a whing-ding with his first pistol."

Wells' eyes narrowed. "Dead?"

"No," I said. "But serious, I'm afraid. The Kid stayed to take care of him."

Wells turned to Rattle Whiskers, who caught his cue.

"I'll take you across if you want to go," the doughty old wingman said. "Orchid will be anxious about you. If

you're feeling well enough to make the flight—" Rattle Whiskers finished with a "come-on" toss of the head and clicked off down the tunnel. We put Wells through the rock window to wait for him outside, and they soared away before the Fire Goddess had finished her whispered oration.

CHAPTER XXX

The Sheep from the Goats

A GAIN we were listening to her.

She gave the crowd its money's worth, and us too. The veil of mystery over this floating desert began to clear. The ancestors of this tribe, she said, had evolved on this desert centuries ago when the earth was young.

This continent was a part of the earth then, she explained. But in the shrinking of the earth's crust this flake shell was cast off—for it was only a flake compared to the earth's total surface. And so, apart from the shrinking earth it kept its own identity and its own life. Moreover, in the course of passing centuries, it acquired its own peculiar exceptions to the laws which govern most heavenly bodies.

"Your existence . . . was a cruel one in those centuries," the Goddess said. "I took pity on you . . . and guided your evolution . . . I saw to it . . . that you developed wings and a physique . . . that could withstand desert life . . . *But I have never given you the right to say . . . that you have achieved . . . perfection.*"

McCorkle gave a knowing nod to us at these words. "More fuel for a rebellion."

"In fact, it is I," she went on, "who have called vonzels from the earth during recent centuries."

She added that recently some had arrived through devices of their own.

Knowledge in the nearby earth was developing to a degree that enabled non-winged men to come of their own volition. But when the roar of thunder announced the arrival of a new party, that was her doing. It meant that she was lifting, out of some convenient space and time, some specimens to be *awarded* to this tribe.

"I have *tried* to reward you with vonzels . . . in return for certain good deeds . . . I have hoped that you would let them be blended with your tribe . . . Through them you might add new qualities . . . to your *race* . . . to enrich your blood . . . little by little . . . But what has happened to these vonzels?"

The question brought a roar from the multitude, half sullen, half amused. Everyone knew what had been happening to these "gifts" since Thunder Splitter had come to power.

Then, "Did the power you call Flash Death ever tell you . . . that *he* wanted these vonzels eaten? . . . (Cold silence) . . . Did he ever tell you anything? . . . Did you ever see any manifestation of him? . . ."

Someone must have shouted back in reference to the earthquake, for the next whisper was a long shaming hiss. Then, "Storms! Earthquakes! They are rooted deeply in the same nature . . . that grinds rocks to sand. They are not unleashed by any vain oratory . . . How can you be so stupid? . . . They will come when they are ready."

Finally she referred to some groups of vonzels.

"What vonzels would not intermarry with you if they find you congenial? The six Babylonians, men and women, who came long ago . . . would be worthy members of your tribe today . . . if someone's appetite hadn't prevented . . . The Greek warriors of recent days were so inclined . . . One

you killed for a feast . . . The other is now wooing a winged maiden in the distant hills.

"Soon . . . now that I am finding pleasure in the way many of you are receiving my words . . . soon I will send you more vonzels . . . males and females . . . from other times and places . . . Do you understand all that I have said?"

There was some sort of commotion at the front of the group, now, and we guessed that the Goddess had drawn fire from some of her listeners.

It was Thunder Splitter, as we afterward learned, who spoke out in hard defiance.

He orated like a Nazi fanatic obsessed with the idea of a super race.

"Such clumsy bodies these vonzels possess!" he cried. "We proud winged people would throw away our most prized qualities if we took theirs into our race. Take that wingless man named Wells, who should have been executed—who *will* be before another slip is made by our traitors. Did you see what weak, naked, unfeathered shoulders he carried? How could such a man be worthy to father any child of our tribe? He is good only for feasting!"

WE HEARD the echoed furor which this speech called forth.

Soon the Goddess concluded her appeal with a most dramatic invitation.

"Will all of you . . . who wish to rid yourself of the feast rituals . . . *come this way.*"

With her right wing she beckoned to the eastward U—the slope toward our left, toward our peak and the northeast range. "Let us see . . . which of you . . . understand me."

Thunder Splitter, not to be outdone, issued an order to all who would join him in the next feast to follow him now

into the U to the south of the spike of rock—toward the Octagon.

Slowly the multitude moved, on foot, not on wing. Again that patter of hail on stones as the thousand pairs of talons clicked.

Many of them were answering the Fire Goddess' invitation—perhaps a third of the total.

Another third were following Thunder Splitter.

But the last third only shuffled along, uncertain which of the two courses to take. Finally they stalled there before the spire of rock, unready to make a decision.

Either they had not understood all that the Fire Goddess had said, or else the old habits of accepting traditions were too deeply rooted to be shaken off. A great number of young females were caught in this eddy of indecision, not knowing whether to follow the majority of bold young huskies—Thunder Splitter's force—or the many parents and elders who were following the Fire Goddess.

At this moment one of the Goddess' promises burst into fact. A cloud had rolled dark and ominous over the desert flat. A flash of lightning cracked out of it, and a heavy clap of thunder boomed through the valleys.

The crowd turned to see. Everyone must have realized instantly that here were more vonzels.

When their eyes turned back to look at the Fire Goddess she was gone.

CHAPTER XXXI

The Promise of a Feast

I F THAT cloud had dropped thirty golden brown footballs and sent them bouncing over the desert sand I couldn't have been any more surprised.

The thirty men and women who ap-

peared were very much the color of footballs, and their healthy naked bodies were rounded with highly developed muscles.

They must have been surprised, as anyone is surprised when first finding himself in a new world. But their perfect teamwork bridged their shock so smoothly that they cooperated on a plan of action with hardly two minutes' delay.

Together they marched westward.

They marched with weapons ready—the clubs, axes, or round stones they had brought in their tight brown fists.

They marched, not with a military step, but with a steady, trudging pace that must have been the march of our ancestors through thousands of long years in the past.

Two men at the rear kept turning their heads to watch for danger. Two women on either side walked with a steady gaze outward, evidently a practiced maneuver of scouting. The leader, who had spotted the multitude of wingmen instantly and chosen his direction accordingly, no longer looked back.

"Cave men!" said McCorkle. "She said these blooming vonzels might come from any time or place. But cave men!"

We were soon on our way, winged along by our faithful carriers, and out of a natural curiosity we stopped in a hollow of sand to peek over and watch them pass.

No such specimens as these had ever hit the desert before, I would guess. Still, when you stopped to think that the Goddess might have the privilege of picking anyone out of the last hundred thousand years of time, she'd have to be awfully choosy *not* to get a cave man.

Far to our south the mass meeting of the wingmen had fountained up into a spray of wings going out in all direc-

tions—and it left you wondering whether the Goddess' message had stuck, or whether, like many a sermon or movie on the earth, its inspiration had been cast off as soon as such a meeting was out.

I WAS especially curious to know which way that doubtful third would flop.

Of Thunder Splitter's crowd there was no doubt—they were intent on carrying on with their feast tradition. And they weren't going to pass up the thirty very appetizing specimens who had just landed.

We saw them coming, following cautiously at a distance, and you just knew they were watching for one of these cave men to fall behind the others and into their clutches.

A rumor came out of that afternoon's long hot pursuit that Thunder Splitter was fascinated by the looks of the slender girl, the next to the youngest in the group. The versions of the rumor were that he exclaimed, "She would look well in wings!" or "I'd like to take her for a ride."

Though a more likely version was, "She appeals to my appetite more than anyone. Don't misunderstand me. I intend to eat her first."

Another rumor that was later pretty well established concerned the fate of the first wingmen who came down to attack the party. He fell victim to one of those full-muscle stalwarts, who quickly choked him to death with steel fingers.

Something like this must have accounted for the way Thunder Splitter and his band of huskies kept a margin of distance between themselves and their quarry.

When we heard these wingmen hopping along not far from the hollow where we hid, they were in high spirits,

unblighted by the recent blasts from the Goddess.

"There'll be a great feast!" Thunder Splitter kept telling them. "A great, *great* feast for those of you who stay with me."

The bestial expression of Thunder Splitter left no doubt that he construed the coming of these vonzels as a stroke of good fortune.

CHAPTER XXXII

Prophecies Concerning a Birth

POOOR Slim fought a hard but losing battle. As I look back on his last days of life I can't help thinking of his amazing fortitude. Plenty of guts there, not only when it came to fighting but also in that grim business of suffering in silence.

When we trooped back, one or two at a time from the mass meeting, we were so full of excitement that everyone of us had to tell Slim and the Kid all about it.

Slim might have groaned, "For God's sake, let me rest. Can't you see I'm dying?" But instead he just listened and nodded and his long homely face gave us a half smile.

The Goddess had been something very special to him. He had seen her at times when McCorkle claimed that his own eyes saw nothing. And so there was that pleased light in Slim's eyes, especially when we told how the Goddess made them declare themselves for or against her.

"She'll lead them out of this if they'll give her a chance," he would say.

"Are you getting any better, Slim?"

"I think so . . . The Kid was a swell doctor . . . but these things take time."

As days passed we realized he wasn't getting any better. One night he called

for Wells.

"Best wishes, Wells," Slim said, "to your family . . . I hope it will be a boy, Wells . . . to fight these desert battles easier than we've fought them."

"Your battle won't be lost, Slim," Wells said, taking him by the hand. "We'll see to that."

When Slim's life had passed out of his body we buried him with a simple ceremony. His resting place was to the west of the Green Tooth, where the shadow of the peak fell in the morning. The spot was also within view of the summit of the roundtop hill where the Goddess of White Flames dwelt.

"He would like it that way," McCorkle said.

Now we turned with new resolve to the task of consolidating our forces for a showdown fight with Thunder Splitter.

The converts that the Goddess had won for us made their headquarters not far from our camp. They organized themselves with leaders, and kept up constant scouting activities which enabled us to work with less of that old fear of surprise attacks.

The cave men had to be contacted, and that called for all the skill and ingenuity that Wells and McCorkle could muster. It took weeks to gain their confidence and establish a web of simple language as a prelude to explaining the conflict that would soon threaten their lives.

Once the cave men understood, they became sturdy pillars in our fortress. They already had ample evidence of the bestiality we meant to fight. They numbered twenty-seven now, instead of thirty. Several attempts had been made by Thunder Splitter's hosts to frighten all of them into submission.

THESE had failed. But traps had cost them two warriors and a girl

—the slender next-to-the-youngest girl who—it was once rumored—had caught Thunder Splitter's eyes. She, in fact, had become the first feast that the cave men had witnessed.

Along with drilling for defenses against surprise attacks, we had a number of less exciting tasks of preparation. We planted supplies of food and jars of water in more than fifty places over the land. We practiced young boys in throwing stones, and we experimented with stone-throwing machines on the order of Franz Cobert's knife hurling device.

We worked at feverish speed, it seemed. Still, the approaching battle was not our only excitement.

Certain wingmen who scouted daily and nightly against all dangers kept a special lookout for Franz Cobert. No one knew where he had taken up his hermit existence. He had not dared show his face since the night the bullet got Slim.

But Cobert was still in the vicinity, we knew, and still up to his old tricks. Now and again a voice would roll out of a hollow stone or the tunnel of the spring, calling some sharp command. And once, under the full light of day, Whitey Everett was confronted by him.

Whitey returned from that encounter so scared he was sick for three days. He said he couldn't remember *where* they had met. He couldn't remember what had been said except that Cobert had cursed the late Slim Winkle for taking his razor. Cobert's face was a mat of black whiskers, his clothes were rags—and his eyes were as cunning as ever.

The Greek was ready to give us a hand in any battle against Thunder Splitter's host. He camped apart from us but his visits became more frequent. He was a high spirited, loquacious fellow, with a high degree of curiosity.

He wanted to know what kind of

baby Wells and Orchid were going to have. He wanted to know so that he and his own native mate would know what to count on.

And when no one could answer him with certainty, he grew very wise and made his own prophecy. He said it would have wings.

There was something in his ancient Greek literature that authorized him to predict wings, he said.

But Orchid was not pinning her faith on any superstition or mythology and, although the Greek's prophecy pleased her, it didn't reassure. In fact, when he began to broadcast his prediction too confidently she became annoyed, yes, and worried.

"He means no harm," Wells would say. "Do you dislike him?"

"No," said Orchid, "but I distrust his ideas. The more he assures me there will be wings, the more I fear there won't."

"You should hear what Thunder Splitter and his crowd are saying. They can hardly wait to learn if it doesn't have clumsy legs like mine and no wings. But as for the Greek," Wells smiled, "I'll tell him to quiet his prophecies."

One of the old winger ladies who had prided herself that her predictions never failed came to Orchid to console her.

"It will be a girl," the old lady said. "It will have the legs and arms of your husband."

"And wings?" said Orchid, her eyes moist with eagerness.

But the old lady would not answer the question.

The rumors that floated back to us from Thunder Splitter's camp were nothing less than malicious propaganda intended to warn all wingmen against interracial marriages. Most absurd was the story that Orchid already knew from the movement of the child in her

womb that it would have no wings!

No wings! What a disgrace to the proud wingman race!

But the insidious talk did not stop there.

What, Thunder Splitter asked, will the family do when their child is born without wings? Will they bear their disgrace?

No, he said, they would kill their wingless child and steal the child of some winged family and call it their own.

"Take warning, you good wingmen who have newly born babies," Thunder Splitter would orate to the groups of doubtful tribesmen wherever he could find them. "Take warning that your babe may be stolen."

All of which was fuel for the approaching conflict that no man or wingman could stop.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Cobert Plays His Hand

ONE morning before daylight I strolled down a sandy path alone, thinking of Slim Winkle. The dawn was held back under a bank of heavy blue-gray clouds. The Green Tooth cast no shadow toward Slim's grave this morning.

While I was standing there by the mound someone called my name. I turned. It was Kid Smith.

"Want to take a walk with me, Burton?" he said.

"Sure. What's up?"

"That's what I mean to find out." The Kid was in one of his rare unsmiling moods. He was carrying a pistol in his belt. His face was grim. He gave a toss of his head and I followed him.

"Just in case I need a witness," he said.

"Sure. Glad to be of service." I hiked along the foothills with him.

I had never forgotten what McCorkle had told me about the Kid's good disposition. He was the most cheerful and accommodating cuss in the world, until something aroused his fighting spirit. Such as Cobert had once done by overplaying his infected foot, imposing on the Kid's good nature.

That incident had driven a clean wedge between Cobert and the gang—and none too soon. Subsequent deeds from Cobert's scheming brain had proved him a murderous paranoid, bent on making himself a god over every wingman, Thunder Splitter included.

The Kid and I talked this over as we hiked through the gray morning.

"I know his hiding place at last," said the Kid. "It's in the niche between those black pillars where it looks like a coal mine cropping out of the hill."

"How did you find out?"

"By keeping an eye on Whitey Everett. He sees more than any hawk. He watches everything because he's afraid. And do you know, I think he's actually attracted to the things he fears. It's a wonder the winger gluttons haven't seized him."

"Then Whitey knows of Cobert's hideout?" I said, astonished.

"He discovered it this week. Yesterday he went toward it, the fool, unarmed. He stopped not quite within hailing distance. Cobert saw him, motioned to him to come on."

"And Whitey came?"

"Not yesterday. He just stood there watching. He must have had the feeling someone else was watching him. That someone was me, hiding among the crags. But early this morning—"

"Whitey went?" I asked.

"Yes. At least he started in that direction. At first I thought you were fol-

lowing him too . . . Here's where we climb the vines to the next level . . . Quiet now. The pillars are right up there, beyond that clump of orange-barked trees."

We went along stealthily. The Kid paused to point the pistol at a fresh foot-track. It would have been easy for a heavyweight like the Kid to start the soft dirt sliding along this steep slope. That light track was Whitey Everett's.

Now the black pillars unfolded before us. We leaned to the rocks and shrubs for cover with every step.

The voice of Cobert burst out suddenly, so clear and loud that my blood froze. I thought he was addressing us.

"All right, you've come. Now you get it straight," he said. He was only twelve yards from us. His heavy black whiskers and hair, and the dark marble wall back of him made his cunning eyes look strangely bright—too bright. His brown hands slapped back against the marble in a confident gesture. "Yes, you'll do it for me."

THE voice of Whitey came forth, choked and frightened. "I only came here—to—to see you. I thought you might be in trouble."

Cobert might not have heard. His eyes were scheming.

"Yes, you've cleared the way for me. You can do it."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Whitey complained.

"When the child is born, you'll be there. You'll have a chance to get it that first week . . . Yes you will. They trust you. You'll get it. Do you understand?"

"I understand your words, but—"

"You'll take the child right up to the yellow table rock above your camp."

"There?" Whitey was aghast. "But that rock can be seen by—by the huskies that keep spying on us."

"So you've seen them? Your eyes *are* sharp! Yes, that's where you'll take the child. Place him on the yellow table rock. You're only taking him out for air."

"Air? They'll never believe—"

"They'll let you have him. You'll deliver, do you understand? Then the huskies will swoop down and overpower you. You can't help that, can you?"

"What—what do you want the child for?"

"That depends. If it's got any wings I'll remove them. If it's got any hands—or human legs—I'll remove them. Then we'll give the child back—and it will be the most accursed child this damned race ever produced."

"You wouldn't do that!" Whitey snapped with a healthier blaze of temper than I would have given him credit for.

"I'll do just that and I'll make history!" Cobert growled. "Thunder Splitter will rise on this child's misfortune—and I'll rise on Thunder Splitter."

"But this—this atrocity! The gang will know! Wells will know! Everyone that ever saw the baby will swear it wasn't born that way."

Whitey was putting up a frantic scrap for a person almost frozen with terror. But Cobert laughed in his face.

"The physical body is what people see, you sap. You can swear till doomsday that a man *ought* to have arms—or he *ought* to have wings—but if he hasn't got them, who the hell cares what you swear? You'll deliver—and this child will be cursed to its dying day."

"I won't deliver." Whitey said it and he meant it. Poor scared guy, his voice trembled. He was a weak kitten and he knew it. He'd trapped himself by coming here. But he repeated his choked, "I won't! Let me go."

"You'll do it or die!"

With a rush of bare feet the savage Cobert went for him. For an instant we couldn't see either of them. Then both men swung into view. The fury of flying fists was before us—only for a moment.

Cobert's ugly fingers closed on Whitey's throat. Another second would have been the end of Whitey.

The Kid stepped in with his pistol. He didn't speak. He just walked in on Cobert, and that cunning demon saw him coming.

The Kid's lips curled in a slight smile, as if here was a nice favor he could do for his friends. A pleasant bit of accommodation.

Cobert threw his hands up. Futile gesture. The Kid shot him dead.

Later that day several of us gathered at the roundtopped mountain and dropped the dead body into the pit. The Fire Goddess must have been waiting. There was a slight *fsst!*, a wisp of dark smoke, and Cobert was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The Blessed Event

THE father was, contrary to tradition, the only calm and collected person in attendance when the time came.

Those winged women, trying to be so efficient and thoughtful, were fairly flying circles around themselves. Jabber, jabber, jabber—you never heard so much wingwoman talk. You'd have thought this was the birth of an heir to a royal throne from all their hubbub.

The Greek ran around from one group to another, asking whether there was any news yet, wondering how much longer it would be. He was so excited McCorkle said, "Who do you think you are, the father?"

But the Greek's excitement was

supercharged with a very personal interest. He was going to be a father himself, in due time, and he wanted to be sure this business of having offspring could be managed successfully.

He found his best listener in Maxie Hammerstein. It seems that Maxie had taken a fancy to a certain little winged dame he called Kewpie-puss. He was making some plans of his own.

In the seclusion of the cinnamon roll tunnels of Green Tooth the child was born. At high noon Rattle Whiskers came bouncing out of the new tunnel entrance. He came yelling and hip-hurrahing in all languages at once. He jumped up and down until he started a small avalanche down the Green Tooth.

"It's a boy! It's a boy! A boy with legs—with hands—with wings!!!"

Wells was so proud he couldn't do anything but smile an immense broad grin for the rest of the day.

Meanwhile the news went over the mountains as fast as wings could carry it.

"It's a boy—with arms—hands—legs—and wings!"

CHAPTER XXXV

The Noise of Battle

A PARTY flew south on a scouting mission, and I was one of the wingless men who got to go along.

We hid in the mountain crags with the Octagon in full view. It had become a parade ground for the exercises of war. Primitive war, indeed, but no less to be reckoned with than the more highly civilized forms of dealing death.

Throughout the day you could hear the thump, thump, thump of falling rocks. This was the noise of target practice—dropping rocks from the air.

A target, such as a pile of dead brush, would be placed in some corner of the

Octagon. Then a squadron of winged huskies would zoom off into the air—almost with the precise formation of bombers—each husky carrying one single rock which he would drop as he approached the target.

At first these efforts were so inaccurate as to be comical. Still, as the day progressed, we could see that some of these huskies were becoming excellent marksmen. All of them would, in due time, if Thunder Splitter's ranting had any effect.

There were other types of drill. The most fearful to my eyes, was that of the same old mass attack that had hit our party the night they got Slim. Those swift swoops of three or four wingmen toward a single victim (usually a sand rat in these practice attacks) were enough to worry any man not blessed with wings.

McCorkle and I agreed that the best defense against these would be a long sharp sword in a lightning-quick arm. We had never forgotten the lesson the Greek had taught us. Back in our camp, swords were being turned out slowly—crude blades of soft iron, with handles of tightly wound strands of yellow grass.

Our supply of bullets had melted away to a sadly small reserve. Now in the face of an oncoming battle we realized that firearms couldn't be depended upon. Half of the pistols had been lost to Thunder Splitter's huskies on the night of Slim's tragedy.

And so, as we weighed the elements of fighting power, we realized that any battle might boil down to a clash of wing against wing, muscle against muscle.

The third of the population we had seen to be doubtful had begun to break up. The tension over the desert was too hot for any able bodied husky to remain long on the fence.

Thunder Splitter's rallying slogan tugged like a magnet for the allegiance of many of these doubtful ones. His cry went out as soon as he heard the news of Orchid's winged baby. It was a slogan meant to appeal to every native denizen of the desert:

"No other race—no combination of races—can ever be superior to the true wingman."

WHEN in the caprices of flight of some of our wingmen—or women—passed within hailing distance of Thunder Splitter's wingmen, this slogan was hurled through the air.

But no mere words could shake the feelings of Orchid's friends who came to her bed of grass and saw her babe. That finely shaped little creature nursing at her breast had a way of reaching right to their hearts. They couldn't help being thrilled at the sight of its tiny, cunning fingers, or the long, silvery blue tapering wings that reached almost to its pink heels.

"There was never a baby like that before," the old wingwomen would say, and then they would laugh with delight to recognize the new truth which this baby gave to their old well-worn expressions of sentiment.

"But will he be able to fly?" the skeptical old males would ask. "Won't those legs grow too heavy and clumsy before he ever learns?"

"He will fly!" Orchid would say. "Of course he will fly. Just wait and see! On his wings he will soar over the highest clouds. And with his clever hands he will fashion the finest tools. He will bring the life of our desert to a new level."

The old males would fall silent, wondering if it might be so. And the females would jabber their extravagant compliments. Even the mother and father would be surprised in the course

of time, such wonders would this child accomplish.

No one found any fault, of course. Unless it was the Greek warrior, who, in spite of his amazement at the wonder of such a baby, did drop the comment that a little more of the typical Grecian features would have improved its face.

"It's a perfectly good face," McCorkle countered. "Good enough to be named in honor of St. Patrick. I suggest we name it—"

"Not so fast, Corky," said Wells. "It's Orchid Wings' privilege to choose the name."

Orchid smiled. "I have had the name ready all along. I will call him Little Wells."

Did that ever make our erstwhile lieutenant proud! He fairly strutted without taking a step.

Until the naming of the baby, Wells had been reluctant to take a position of leadership over the wingmen who had sided with us. Now that he saw their reaction, their whole-hearted approval over a winged child's being named for its non-winged father, his own self-confidence reached a new high.

"I have everything to fight for," he told the old males as they counselled with him. "Yes, I will accept command of your defenses. Rattle Whiskers shall be my first assistant."

"As your first assistant," said Rattle Whiskers, "I advise that you and Orchid take your baby to some safer refuge to the northwest. The rocks may hail down on this region at any hour."

That week the first few tons of rocks fell around the new tunnel entrances near the top of the Green Tooth.

At first we laughed. They couldn't possibly hurl rocks to make them whirl through the bends at the tunnel entrance. The most damage they did was

to cut up some of our paths around the peak.

FOR a few weeks these insignificant skirmishes came and went with very few casualties. Our knives caught three wingtips early one morning when the huskies thought they were about to get away with a sneak attack. When the feathers flew, so did the huskies—at each other, in keeping with their old custom.

But this was the last time the old wingtip gag worked. Our winged patrol followed the husky squadron on their mockery chase back to camp. There Thunder Splitter gave his men a thorough dressing down.

The old tradition, Thunder Splitter declared, was as dead as a flesh-cleaned skeleton. Henceforth no wingman would ever so much as bat an eye in ridicule if one of his fellows lost a wing-tip.

"It is blood, now, that counts. Smashed skulls, wings ripped off, crushed talons, broken backs—there are the scores that will count."

This report our patrol brought back to us. And with it Thunder Splitter's loud boast that his plan was at last ready. He would carry death to every unfaithful wingman.

On three counts he was sure his army was superior to ours: speed, noise, and numbers.

Our council of men and wingmen talked this claim over in long night hours of discussion.

"Speed they do have," Wells admitted. "But how many of their swiftest young huskies can outrace our venerable Rattle Whiskers?"

Rattle Whiskers raised an eyebrow. Maybe he knew his speed was no longer tops, but this compliment made him feel that he owned the fastest pair of wings in the world.

"Noise they do have," said Wells. "But we aren't afraid of noise. And I ask you, which has the better chance to cleave a wing from a back, the fighter who yells that he is going to do it or one who swoops down silently?"

The listeners nodded their heads in warm approval. Their eyes took on expressions of eagerness for a chance to employ their cunning.

"But what about numbers?" McCorkle asked.

"If we count all who come to us, including those who are past the age of fighting," said Wells, "our number exceeds theirs. We have won more of the doubtful third than they."

If this was so, it was partly because the coming of Little Wells had been publicly blessed by the Fire Goddess. And because, in spite of predictions before, and lies after the child's birth, the whole desert had learned of its physical form.

Thunder Splitter had been ingenious enough to hurl other blocks in the path of racial mixtures. One of these was his propaganda warning that simply because Little Wells happened to have hands, legs, and wings was no proof that all other offspring of mixed parentage would be similarly blessed.

I CONFESS that this warning struck through the weak spot in our scarcely scientific assumptions. After all, could we be sure? Would there ever be another child like Little Wells?

Orchid Wings, bless her heart, knew the answer.

"It is one of my secrets," she said, "a bit of secret knowledge which I confided to Wells before we married. Far to the north of us there live two or three families that are half winged, half non-winged. These were formed when a few of the Babylonian vonzels escaped the feasts many seasons ago.

"And from these marriages," Orchid went on, "have come offspring with hands, legs, and wings—even as our Little Wells."

To which Wells added, "Orchid took me to the north edge of the desert for our honeymoon and I saw these children."

"Let Thunder Splitter fly north and see for himself," Orchid Wings concluded.

And so again our side had the advantage in this strange war of nerves. Our propaganda rang true. It was not noise, but facts. Thunder Splitter must have sensed that nothing short of military victory would regain the prestige now slipping from him.

It came. With a fury that excelled all our anticipations, it struck like a mad beast.

The days were blackened with the hail of stones. The nights were sparked with the clash of blades. Terror cut through the hearts of peace-loving wingmen. And even to such war-hardened soldiers as Wells and McCorkle the bitterness of this primitive war struck home.

What few bullets we had saved from earlier skirmishes were put to good use. They scored almost one hundred percent.

Quickly the last of them were spent—and Thunder Splitter himself failed to catch any of them. He had wisely kept out of range from that dramatic hour when he had seen one of his favorite huskies drop like a stone.

We retreated several times, moving a share of our supplies to some point miles away.

Dawn would find Thunder Splitter's warriors dropping rocks on an enemy that wasn't there. And before the rising light revealed us our swiftest wingmen would try to swoop down with knives. Then the wild yells would ring

through the morning air. A rapid thumping of stones would follow—for no husky cared to get caught on the wing while burdened with heavy talons.

Furious hand-to-hand combats were inevitable. Wings would flutter like slapping fans. Sometimes one of our wingmen would feign a retreat to the ground, and the enemy could come bounding after him in groups of twos or threes. They would be led in a zig-zag chase close over the surface. Then suddenly some one without wings would leap out of the bushes and stab.

And so, as we learned to retreat by night, we acquired the skills of shifty attacks at unexpected moments. The more we retreated, it seemed, the more we strengthened our slight margin of numbers and power over Thunder Splitter's hosts.

We hardly dared hope that a decisive victory might be carved by the addition of these telling knife strokes. And yet we were beginning, inevitably, to feel an optimistic glow—when suddenly the unexpected came down upon us like an eclipse, and blacked out all our hopes.

The unexpected something arrived at dawn out of a cloud of pink smoke. It landed with more noise than a volley of falling stones, and when the pink smoke cleared we gazed through our field glasses to behold a very complex spectacle.

There on the sand flat stood an army of fifty Nazi soldiers, and an astonishing lot of mechanized equipment. In command was one burly red-faced German professor whom I had last seen in bed, snoring.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Beyond the McCorkle River

THAT day cost us.

We tried one lightning attack

with a squadron of our best wingmen. It was the only thing to do—to try to grab a couple machine guns and a few rounds of ammunition to keep from being slaughtered before sundown.

For we knew only too well that the German professor would start his death march straight toward the non-winged men from the earth. McCorkle, Wells, Maxie and I—we were the ones who—if allowed to live—would ultimately endanger a Nazi foothold here.

That and the fact that there was a natural kinship between the German and Thunder Splitter—in temperament and purpose and method—these factors were Wells' cue for his swift action.

Wells called for volunteers for the daring deed. Seventeen wingmen flew to the task. Eight of them came back whole; three others flopped or limped away to safety, more or less riddled by bullets. The remainder were shot to hell by the starchy Nazi soldiers.

But the eight who returned bore one machine gun back. Maxie and the Kid went to work with it and mowed a full fourth of the professor's force down almost before they knew they were on solid ground.

Then two sturdy little hill-climbing tanks were rolling toward us. It was time to drag ourselves back to a steeper terrain.

No rest for the wicked or the righteous after that. This was our same old war, a miniature version of it, with the added novelty of all the weapons being on one side.

We tried desperate strategies to keep the German and Thunder Splitter apart, but we lost that trick, as Wells had known we would.

Our enemies joined forces and fire-arms were put in the hands of Thunder Splitter's huskies. They were regular demons, hog-wild for anything that would shoot. It was true that they

completely lacked the discipline of the thirty Nazis. In general, too, they were less brutal, less likely to choose women and children for targets. But their ability to fly over us with rifles multiplied our dangers ten times over. It was a rare night for us that went by without a burial service.

Nothing but that deeply rooted instinct to survive held us together in the days that followed. We were surely only postponing the inevitable. We dodged, we maneuvered, we gambled madly on our primitive weapons—and somehow accomplished just enough to keep alive that dim ray of hope.

But we were continually on the retreat, wearing ourselves out with night after night of escape to new hiding places, usually to be discovered and attacked before another sunset.

Whenever they gave us a breathing spell we would set up a sort of fake camp half camouflaged. Soon they would blast it to pieces—and then discover we weren't there. Little strategies of this sort cost them ammunition and lifted our morale. But their supplies seemed unlimited.

NOW we were thankful for Wells' foresight in having us store food and water. Even the women and children of our camps could withstand lots of nerve strain as long as they weren't forced to go hungry and thirsty.

All the while Orchid Wings and Little Wells, together with a few friends were hiding in the deep caverns of the Green Tooth. Most of our own wingmen believed they had flown far to the northwest. Never was a secret more closely guarded.

At length the murderous German professor hit upon a sure scheme for bringing our resistance to an end. He began poisoning the water pools in the path of our circling retreats. That got

us where bullets had failed. Within a week we were almost done in. One by one our stored water jugs were drained to their last hot muddy drops.

Now we were forced to make a break for the larger running springs that couldn't easily be poisoned'. . . and so, eventually we bolted back to the Green Tooth.

At once the dogged armies of huskies and Nazis set up camp outside the peak to besiege us.

"You'll starve out in ten days!" old Thunder Splitter roared at us from behind a safe rocky wall. And the next day, "You'll starve out in nine days."

The professor added, "You could send your women and children out now. We'll take care of them."

OUR outlook was blacker than the chamber walls. We felt that for the last time we were united—wingman and non-winged, young and old—to face our common fate. Wells called roll each day and Rattle Whiskers distributed food in even shares. A fine subterranean river of water could be depended upon. But the grim fact was, we were already starving. When Thunder Splitter's taunt still gave us eight days I didn't see how we could last four.

The machine gun and a little ammunition, stored here as an emergency protection for Orchid Wings and her babe, now came to life for a last brief fling. We brought it up to the tunnel entrance and used it at night to distract the besiegers while a party of food gatherers would creep forth through a newly dug exit.

Then the ammunition ran out and the gun was dead. And the siege around us intensified. The ingenious German planted guns to cover every tunnel opening. He must have had the triggers set to fire automatically from an impulse of infra-red light rays.

On the blackest night any slight movement at the mouth of a tunnel would draw bull's eye bullets. Our trap was as complete as a six-walled steel vault with an explosive mine for a door.

Down in a deep chamber above the river that Maxie Hammerstein had named for himself I heard him and McCorkle pacing the floor cursing their luck.

"To think that we once had that damned professor right here," said McCorkle. "We could have killed him so easy."

"Easier than getting him up through the tunnel," Maxie. "A guy ought to think twice before he does his fellow man a kindness. He may live to regret it."

One pathetic bit of happiness came to all of us in the midst of descending tragedy. Little Wells was now several months old—not old enough to try walking, but a wonderful crawler on hands and knees.

One day the baby's random wing flapping that accompanied his crawling exercises suddenly produced the magical effect that made hearts skip beats! *Little Wells flew!*

Only a short hopping flight, of course, but a flight nevertheless.

In that hour starving men and wing-men watched in awe, and some laughed with delight and others wept. It was like a vision of what could be—what might have been if these ruthless men of power from our earth civilization hadn't come to shatter all hopes.

"I knew he would fly," Orchid said, smiling and weeping at once. "I knew it."

Back and forth the little fellow went, laughing and gurgling. It's the nearest thing to a miracle I know, the way a baby less than a year old can redirect the spirits of a group of heavy-hearted grown-ups.

Wells kissed the child. "My funny little human angel," he said. "Maybe I won't see you again. But what you've shown me today is your promise—to all of us—that if you live—if you grow up—you'll finish this task we've started. Good bye, little fellow."

THEN to the rest of us Wells gave strict orders that we were not to follow him. He bade Orchid Wings a brief farewell and was off. He wended his way through the dark passage to the old river tunnel that had gone dry before our time.

McCorkle nudged me and we followed.

"That's the McCorkle river, named after my granddaddy who turned prohibitionist before he died. I've got a right to see what goes on here. Come on."

Darkness, darkness, darkness! Then—

A bit of silvery light—darkness again—then bright gleams of gold glinting from iron-stained rocky walls.

The light footfalls of Wells were a few turns ahead of us, barely within hearing.

Now the light burst full and white upon our eyes, and there was Wells kneeling, gaping upward.

This was the pit of the Goddess!

We were at the bottom of what had appeared to be a well, only now we saw it as a vast wide hall of space between the black floor and the glassy ceiling thirty feet or more overhead.

We were looking up at the fire—a weird golden blaze that would leap and fall and spread and narrow down to a slender flame. Tongues of flame would reach out to illuminate the glassy ceiling overhead—vast arms that must have been a mile or more long. And where they reached, we could momentarily see up through the sand crystals

—could see Nazis treading drowsily over the desert floor above us, or lazy sand rats sunning themselves.

With what ease an observer from this vantage point might follow the goings-on of the desert! Were there any limits to the Flame Goddess' range of observation? we wondered. Perhaps we would always wonder.

There she stood, in the full glory of blinding incandescence, towering up through the opening in the round-topped mountain.

Then she looked down at Wells and smiled such an interesting smile! She knew all the time that he was there—and that he was almost stunned with surprise that the tunnels led him there. That smile of hers—for an instant my heart stopped beating. I had never seen her at close range before. I had never felt the curious electrical vibrations from being in her presence. I recalled McCorkle's vivid account of her strange magnetism. Then my fears eased, for she spoke in her soft whispering voice.

"Your friends, Wells . . . have them join you . . . to listen to my words . . . I am aware of your troubles . . ."

Wells looked around, amazed and a bit dismayed to discover that he had been shadowed.

"There is no time to loose," the Goddess whispered. "Follow me."

Maybe the passage had been there before. Maybe the mountain broke apart for us to pass through. I was too dazzled to know. We moved—I cannot say that we walked—we moved as if drawn along upon the train of a flowing gown of cold fire.

We were taken to the top of the Green Tooth peak, where the deadly automatic guns might perforate us with bullets.

The bullets came, then, with their fa-

miliar clatter and whine of death. But for some reason they were not striking us. They curved upward as if magnetically drawn by a widespread pair of wings—wings of silver fire. They were consumed.

Pfft, pfft, pfft—tiny wisps of yellow blaze popping over the silver like any sand rat dropped in the pit—or any Franz Coëbert, whose pellets of death were being caught and consumed in the Goddess' feathers of fire.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Flash Death

SHE was calling now. Her low whisper could be heard above the rattle of guns. It penetrated the tunnels. She was calling for our besieged people to come out.

"Come . . . All of you come . . . and follow me."

I looked down the slope, then, and saw the German professor calling to some Nazi soldiers to help him to his feet. He wanted to run *but he couldn't rise*.

And they couldn't come to help him. They were caught in their tracks, as if hypnotized by the blinding figure of fire on this mountain.

Thunder Splitter tried to take to his wings. He was held in the very act of springing from his talons, balanced like a statue that could turn its head or flap its wings, but could not release itself.

Many were the faces of our enemies that now looked up in amazement, caught in the grip of the Goddess' power.

Now our people emerged, a long unbroken line like a tribe starting to migrate. The fear in their faces changed to bewilderment as they heard the bullets being consumed in the Goddess'

wings, and saw the weird array of statues down the slope.

The gunfire ceased. The Goddess spoke.

"These people have suffered enough . . . at your hands . . . the hands of inhumanly cruel beasts. . . . Not wings or claws . . . not features or color . . . or manner of brains . . . can make men beasts . . . but actions . . . actions of hate and greed . . . where there should be goodwill . . . and fair play. . . .

"I promise these people a good future . . . on this continent . . . which shall soon become a garden . . . of life . . . The races . . . that come to this garden . . . shall enjoy its blessings. . . .

"But there is no room . . . for any member of any race . . . who holds delusions of superiority . . . over other races . . . whether you are a wingman . . . or a Nazi . . . if you have that lie in your heart . . . you have no place here. . . .

"Now you know . . . why I have fixed you . . . immobile . . . Because I intend to burn to cinders . . . the evil hearts among you.

"I am *life* . . . to those who love their fellow men . . . But to those who feed their hearts on hate . . . I am the god of your ancient legends . . . *I am the Flash Death!*"

THERE was an awful outcry from the statues. You could see Thunder Splitter beating the air, trying to free himself from his paralysis. You could guess his inspiration—to run forward and shout—to catch the ears of his followers with an oration powerful enough to overthrow this threat.

You could see the beef-faced German professor grinding his teeth, waving his hands violently. He seemed tied down by invisible wires. He yelled and

cursed. So did his soldiers and many a husky feast-loving wingman. But not for long.

The Goddess struck.

They *burned*. Like matchheads they went, one by one—*pfst!*—*pfst!*—*pfst!*

Here and there a few of Thunder Splitter's wingmen were left, to march up toward our group—creatures whose good will must have got rolled under by pressures, or possibly creatures who had been striking their true blows on our side all along.

When the fiery purge was done there were no enemies left on the desert. That strange silence, that sudden emptiness in the danger lands below us was a mark of that rare phenomenon called peace. And most welcome! Time leaped along quite gaily after the purge.

The new leader of the wingmen was Orchid Wings herself, a queen by dint of courage and personal valor. She began at once to reorganize the tribe in ways to facilitate the climb toward a sort of stable civilization. Quite naturally, the wingmen depended upon her to confer with her good husband, who—in spite of his unfortunate wingless condition—appeared to have many valuable ideas about how a good society should be run.

New vonzels came to us as time went on, some from modern pages and modern races; some from the thousands of years previous to modern times. A marriage license bureau would have flourished!

Meanwhile I prepared my notes, deeply grateful to McCorkle and Rat-tle Whiskers for having dropped in on me one rainy night.

Now I am awaiting one of those rare storms that may furnish me with the needed transportation back to the earth.

The last time I talked with McCorkle I asked him if was all set for a storm.

"Storm?" he said, giving me a comi-

cal eye. "That was six mouths ago. It's the stork we McCorkles are waiting for. Or haven't you met that certain

winged colleen who took up an Irish accent just for me?"

THE END

PLASTIC NEWS

FOSTERITE is a new plastic which replaces rubber and seals radar and other electrical devices to make them completely moisture proof. Fosterite was developed by Newton C. Foster, a chemist for Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Co.

The new plastic was widely used by the Army and the Navy and has proved to have added life and service of electrical equipment.

At a demonstration a transformer was coated with the plastic and placed under water. The transformer continued to pass electrical current to an electric light. With coating materials previously available a transformer would function only a few minutes under water. With the new coating, transformers can work under water for months.

Yet for 4000 years, glass has been holding out on us. It is one of the strongest and hardest materials known to man, but because of its brittleness we have not realized its possibilities.

As the result of wartime research, glass has done jobs no other material could do, and it will add immeasurably to the conveniences and comfort of living. Glass can be sawed and nailed like lumber, it will float, bounce, and bend like rubber.

Plans are already under way to use glass-plastic for crumple-proof automobile fenders, household fixtures, streamlined trains, and buses, for luggage, furniture and prefabricated houses. Glass-plastic

is being used in making artificial legs which is one of its many uses.

Glass-wool, another plastic wonder, is being used for seat cushions and mattresses in airplanes because of its softness and resilience. A coarser form of glass-wool, when compressed and faced with smooth plasticized glass cloth makes an excellent lightweight insulating board. Remote Army outpost shelters were heavily insulated with glass-wool to save fuel.

The popular Pyrex glassware, discovered by Corning researchers, is now a second best selection since the super-glass utensils called Vycor has made its public debut. Vycor glassware will resist heat up to 1650 degrees Fahrenheit.

Researchers have also perfected glass ball bearings which will withstand more pressure than metal.

We think of glass as a brittle material that will have a sharp edge wherever it is broken. But glass is now being manufactured which does not scratch when broken into bits. Just think what this will mean to motorists when headlights may be made of this glass.

It is needless to say how many freak ideas have been submitted to the Corning glass laboratories by volunteer correspondents. None of these ideas have been dismissed, but have been thoroughly investigated instead. These glass dreams may one day become realities.

—Laurence A. Foster.

INDIA: LAND OF MYSTERY

ALTHOUGH for centuries now western culture has been trying to impose itself upon the ways of the East, the people of India, by the millions, believe implicitly in the powers of magic and witchcraft. Their lives are guided by the movements of the stars and by the advice of practicing astrologers. And strange tales are told which trouble many a westerner into believing that transmigration of the soul is a reality. A case involving a four year old child who claimed to have two grown sons from her "other" life caused a great sensation among the English. Many who studied the circumstances surrounding the incident ceased to ridicule and began to wonder.

Indians who are given the advice of learned western physicians still patronize their native doctors. In Calcutta there is a shop, one of many of its kind, run by a Sikh known as Babacharan Singh. In it can be found the greasy remains of

snakes, lizards, scorpions, alligators, and bones and brewed flesh of many other animals. Hundreds of skulls are piled there—human, monkey, bear, tiger, rhinoceros, alligator, deer, and many others. They, with shells, bones, and herbs of many kinds are used to cast spells. Babacharan Singh is kept busy by the demands of his customers for medicines made from ground skulls, and nauseating liquids made from boiled down parts of animals. When called upon to perform witchcraft, Singh is proud to comply.

Witchcraft, astrology, transmigration of the soul, the influence of gems—all these play a part in the life of every native of India and sometimes even affect the political scene. There are mysterious forces at work in that land, forces that the peoples of the West are only beginning to understand today.

—Jeffry Stevens.

SCIENTIFIC



It is through the vases and pottery of the Chen-Chen and Chorotega races that we get a picture of the relationship between the races. Both knew the secret of polychrome pottery treatment, and also the plating effect achieved by their metalsmiths. This is a positive indication of a common origin of the races.



Perhaps one of the best proofs we have of the fact that the Moon Empire, centering at its capital at Chan-Chan, had a vast influence on the Amerind peoples is the influence of a huge trading power of a maritime people. There is no indication that their power was imperialistic, therefore, this trading influence that is so evident must have been so enormous as to have had the effect of conquest.



MYSTERIES

THE EMPIRE OF THE MOON

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

What was the mysterious "Empire of the Moon"? Was it the country "beyond the sky" ruled by the "Spider-Chief"?

ONCE in the far-back times, long before the memories of our grandfathers, Snoqualmie River, which in the White Man's Language means Moon-River, had a path which led to the Empire of Beyond-the-sky where the Spider-Chief ruled the Sun, the Moon and the Stars,¹ starts the story-teller. From this point the legend becomes a mere explanation for the phases of the moon. Yet that kernel of truth which every legend seems to have may be contained in the very introduction, as it were. Did the Spider-Chief once rule not only his Moon-Empire but that of the earlier Sun, as well as the people who carried the Venus Calendar, and who possibly later became known, even as the Pawnees, as the "People of the Stars"?

There are a number of reasons which might lead science to suspect that the Moon Empire, radiating from its capital at Chan-Chan, once had a great deal of influence upon Amerind peoples. That this influence was Imperialistic is doubtful. It is more probable that it was the influence of the huge trading power of a maritime people.

In the first place, Chan-Chan depicted the monkey, tropical parrot and other Brazilian animals with the most minute realism, thus showing that she was well acquainted with the fauna of the opposite side of her continent. The vases of Chan-Chan which are rapidly being lost to science in small private collections, by the way, should show us many details of the regular life and dress of her inhabitants.

In the second place the Chorotegans upon the Isthmus, show many Chan-Chan influences though possibly imposed upon an earlier Malay culture. The Chorotegans had a ritualistic headdress of females similar to Chan-Chan, and a similar polychrome pottery² recently revived by the Hopi artist Nampeyo. They furthermore had a similar jewelry with the plating effect achieved by Chan-Chan, the master metalsmiths. This type of metal work is also to be found in the mounds of the Mississippi Valley.

In some other ways the extinct Chorotegans show some likenesses to the Hopi. They had a similar hair-dress for their maidens, for their men, and a similar manner of wrapping the women's

legs with white swathings that resemble, when finished, white boots.

The Pueblos on the other hand wear ceremonial foot-less stockings similar to those depicted upon the vessels of Chan-Chan. Leona Cope makes a most interesting observation about the Zunis, to wit: "The Zuni week is approximately one-third of a month, and is called 'topinto astemla' or 'one ten,' what the basis of such a period is, is unknown, nor does any similar period occur among other tribes in North America, although in South America, it was found among the Peruvians."

Upon the other hand, The Chorotegans, whose supposed monkey-cult is in many ways suggestive of the Malays, also hurried their dead in great slipper urns similar to those of the Java coast. According to the legends of that distant land, in which The Spider Totem was also closely connected with The Moon, the early Javanese were a people of great maritime abilities. The name for this legendary Javanese Empire was Japura, which is today a name for one of the rivers in The Amazon upon which the curiously isolated "Pogsa" or "Moon" tribe of people still survive.

The slipper urn burials of The Chorotegans, by the way, are often completely crusted over with either ash or lava flows, which Joyce believes should give them a certain amount of authentic antiquity. Of course, it is rather hard to judge the age of a lava flow except by the guiding hand of the vegetation growing thereon. Yet it is entirely possible, since this lava does not have the glass-like texture of late obsidian, that this civilization of the Chorotegans might date back to that of Chan-Chan, and should strengthen the antiquity attributable to that city-state whose cemetery, buried under almost one hundred feet of wild bird guano, certainly should give, at the rate of normal accumulation, the third millennium B.C. as the time of its foundation.

Thus the Pacific Spider seems to have touched at several points along the Pacific coast, leaving suspicious imprints of its passing in the portrait-pottery and other features of The Chorotegans, certain features of dress and costume along the Mexican coast, and similar features among the Pueblos, playing out finally among the northern

tribes where the Wolf Totem was strong. This feature after feature seems to have been dropped in the concentric rings that ripple outward, until among the Chinooks, the early power of The Spider merely becomes a legend explaining the phases of the moon!

One of the most interesting features of The Spider are the persistent stories of a script. We know that there was a script in Easter Island which was called The Rongo-Rongo. It was chanted by a certain set of priests and had a curious form of lettering not unlike the unreadable libraries of Crete which seem to have elements of very ancient Greek and Latin. Was this script ancestral to that which we use today, as well as the runes of the Nordic peoples?⁶ In this connection, it is to be noted that The Chortegans, according to Central American legend, once had a script, but none of it has survived up to the present day. There is always the hope which springs eternally within the breast of the true archaeologist, that some of it may yet be discovered, in some cemetery to be opened tomorrow or a hundred years hence.

Radin would postulate a triple invasion of the Pacific to account for certain South American traits—1) Melanesian, 2) South Sea or Polynesian and 3) Mongol. It seems to the present writer that the Melanesian invasion would have left behind an irradicable racial trace of curly hair, which is absent. The negroid types of the Melanesian Islands are a bushy-haired people, and their hair, which in cross-section is flat, leaves some wave upon the hair of the most diluted descendants, such as the Philippinos who probably have only the faintest trace of Melanesian blood. It is more probable that the "plains societies" which these negroids have in common with the Indian were carried to both points by the same invading group carrying the trait.

It seems to the present writer that this postulation should be modified to include the culture of the Indian Ocean before the advent of the Aryan invasion of India. This ancient Malay complex, carrying a maternalistic system, a story of airships and magic flight (possibly later borrowed by the Spider), a well-evolved science and a script, an extensive agriculture grown upon terraced land and a fundamental pre-Aryan (agglutinating language is not scattered over the Pacific from China to the Philippines but is to be picked up again in the Americas, though much distorted by time and amalgamation with foreign elements.

Wissler believes that the Polynesians were late arrivals in the Americas and were not within striking distance before Mayan culture had passed its prime. In this, he is probably entirely correct, if we exclude the culture of The Spider as of pre-Maori origin, and admit that the present likenesses in the South Seas are due to ancestral similarities, the Maoris having perhaps conquered

and amalgamated with isolated fragments carrying a Spider culture.

In a hundred years, with dozens of scientists forever busy examining, sorting and correlating, a much better understanding of the ancient Empire of the Moon is bound to emerge from the present tiny, restricted, culture-area system which is inclined to think of each section of the country as a world in itself. In time from the mass of the miscellaneous, the octopus power of the Spider-Chief will be bound to emerge, thus explaining such legends as that of the Pueblo story-teller who speaks of the island-kingdom of the Spider which once existed in the Western Sea, and that of the Chinook, who connected the fabled kingdom with the Snoqualmie River.

Possibly the great terraced, sunken gardens of Chan-Chan, which seem to be the pyramid in reverse, may emerge with a lost ritualistic meaning, and the magnificent murals which they did upon the stucco walls of their city, take their place as an influence which affected the later painting of murals upon stucco in the Mayan temples. Or the weaving of certain ceremonial fabrics in the Pueblo dances, and the featuring of certain parts of the Spider Totem's costume will in time link back to the visits of the trading fleet of Chan-Chan which introduced the custom. At present, we cannot say: Yet the strangely modern ways of the ancient metropolis, with its aqueducts brought from the mountains, and its sewage system, as well as its orchards and its great cloth factories, is bound to some day win recognition as one of the earth's great lost civilizations. But was this city the victor in the Sun-Moon War? That, we may never know.

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¹A Chinook Legend.

²Polychrome is a multicolored ware.

³Brodeur, along with other authorities upon the Norse. Rhymes is of the opinion that they originated among the Goths upon the Black Sea who had had the advantage of Greek educations, although there are some authorities who would give them an origin from the north of Italy.

FRIENDSHIP AND THE HORMONES

By ROBERT LAWSON

IT IS not at all hard to realize the personality and popularity repercussions arising from the thyroid gland abnormalities. A little thought takes one much farther than that. In the digestive channel just past the stomach there lies a gland (the pancreas) which builds up a marvelous enzyme, enabling the cells of the body and the brain to utilize sugar. This enzyme also feeds the white corpuscles and directly determines their activity.

This gland is subjected to the direct impact of the outside world, by being exposed to all the substance taken in through the mouth. If it were purely an excretory gland, adding fluid only to the digestive tract, that impact might not be so important. However, the Islet cells of the organ are also true endocrine glands, adding their important secretions to the blood, as well as modifying the chyme from the stomach. Having a two-way job, these cells feel the effects of the diet more often than either physician or layman ordinarily imagines. The worst example of these effects is the actual wearing away of the Islets—but there are others.

In 1865, a comprehensive survey of the area around Toronto showed that diphtheria attacked the people who used cane sugar (which requires insulin for its digestion) much more often than those who used honey. Why? *Simply* because in direct proportion with the employment of cane sugar the food stock of the white corpuscles dwindled. Any mother knows that a baby who gets the sugar-bowl may actually poison itself. It is possible, although taste does not often permit it (except in the case of diabetes), for anyone to throw himself into sugar shock by overuse of sugar. There is only one sugar which the body can use without insulin, and that is the fruit sugar called levulose, also found in honey (honey is about 40% levulose).

The endocrine hormone secreted by the pancreas (sometimes referred to as insulin, although there is much reason to believe that insulin is only a split-off part of the true hormone) has also a part in the important process of keeping blood vessel walls in proper tone. It appears that the hormone feeds the linings of such vessels, in somewhat the same manner as it feeds the white corpuscles. People with diabetes are very susceptible to varicose veins (which result from weakness of the blood vessel walls) even when their blood sugar and insulin intake are very carefully guarded. Particularly enough, diabetics who smoke, no matter how careful they are with diet and medication, have much greater grief from this condition.

Sugar shock, which occurs when the sugar in the body ties up the insulin, so that capillary walls cannot maintain their tone, is brought about directly by the oozing of blood serum through the capillary walls in such amount that the non-fluid

tissues of the body are literally poisoned, being unable to excrete, while the total blood-level is reduced.

If your pancreas throws too much of the hormone into the blood, sugar is not allowed to stay at its proper blood level, and the tissues other than the blood get just as hungry as you do. This hunger goes to the point of bodily weakness and tremors. Of course when this imbalance is very bad, convulsions and death occur unless sugar is obtained in time. This is the basis of the insulin shock therapy used some in mental hospitals. Some investigators think that it actually brings about destruction of brain cells.

A good many of the crabby people around town are that way because they have low blood sugar, which means high pancreatic hormone content of the blood. So the old question, "Are you really tough, or just hungry?" becomes pretty meaningful. When too much insulin, or the hormone, is present, the liver, the thyroid and the adrenal cortex have to start burning up tissues, which is what protein utilization means. Oddly enough, the liver is much more stingy with its stored sugar when there is plenty of insulin in the blood than when there is shortage of it.

Personality can be made ineffective by too much blood sugar or too little, and it does not depend only upon how healthy the pancreas is or upon how much sugar is used, or even upon both of these factors. The use of certain foods and drugs can cause over-secretion of the pancreatic hormone. It is not exactly commonly known medical fact that the use of quinine and atabrine can throw one into continuous mild insulin shock, but it is nevertheless true. In one classical case of this type, the writer saw a 500-dollar-a-month technical man become so ineffective on his job because of such medication that he was finally compelled to give it up.

WHEN aspirin and quinine are taken together, the pancreas is so stimulated as to cause insulin-poisoning and shock. This demonstrable fact is also new to medicine, and the phenomenon extends to other benzene-ring compounds (and condensed ring compounds). Because certain foods and drugs contain many benzene-ring compounds, it is immediately apparent that stimulation of the pancreas to an abnormal pitch of activity can be brought about by foods or diet or by both. Sulfa drugs, which interfere with vitamin B metabolism, produce the effects in many people of mild insulin shock. Liver, heart and brain damage from these substances has been quite severe in many cases of record. It is reasonable to assume that where death certificates specify infection as the cause of death when sulfa medication has been used, fifty per cent of the actual death causes may have been

the drugs. Because these drugs interfere directly with the vitamin B oxidation mechanism, it is logical that their effect on the pancreas would produce all the symptoms of high blood insulin except the extreme hunger. The reactions of certain patients through the same mechanism to the anti-syphilitic coal-tar compounds is another illustration in point. Even coffee seems to exert some influence on the secretory function of the pancreas.

Certain other organic derivatives cause a lowering of insulin production, either by damage to the liver, or inhibiting its functions (which will in turn affect the pancreas) or by directly inhibiting the gland itself. Certain sleeping compounds work through these mechanisms, as does diabetes chemically induced in experimental animals. Sometimes, because of differences in glandular equipment, these compounds may excite, instead of depressing, because they allow an abnormally low blood sugar to rise to effective level. Ordinarily, however, the rise in blood sugar from a moderate dose is enough to produce a slight sugar shock and encourage sleep.

In diabetes of the blood, the pancreas has nothing to do with control of blood sugar, because a catalyst-poisoner present in the blood prevents the pancreatic hormone (and insulin injections) from acting as it should. In this terrible disease the pancreas itself is seemingly altogether normal.

The blood sugar in different so called "normal" people tends to stay somewhere between .080% and .120%. People on the upper limits of the range naturally tend to be more quiet and easy-going, sleeping soundly and long, while those who favor the low balance of blood-sugar are naturally lighter sleepers, more tense and nervous, sometimes quite irritable, inclined to be allergic and neurotic. It is apparent that psychiatry only tried half of the pancreatic effects by employing insulin shock against insanity. The chances are even that they would have had as much success by using sugar shock as by using sugar lack. Extreme shock of either nature leads to coma and death.

In a very few cases the pituitary gland (which partially governs most of the other glands) permits low blood sugar, even down to .045% without symptoms of too much pancreatic hormone ever showing up, because of the over-production of the post-pituitary hormones. People thus constituted are inclined to be very fat and slow and relaxed.

Basic personality traits (those which arise from the amount of proper combustion in the body as a whole) are greatly influenced, either by too active a pancreas or too little hormone production. The man with the constant grouch is likely to have low blood sugar compared to the man with the ready smile, who oftentimes may have almost too high a percentage of h.s.

The emergent personality traits are more likely to show up in the man who tends to be placid on

account of plentiful energy substance in the blood. Because, however, this type of person is usually too easy-going, he is not given to turning on the steam in order to "go someplace." Because he can coast along without excitement to bolster him up, that is just what he does. He prefers a quiet job, a quiet home, quiet clothes, and has quiet enthusiasms because he is quiet. His thyroid, which may have been slightly cheated from birth (causing a slight deficiency of pancreatic hormone by nature of original equipment) is called upon somewhat more by the high blood carbohydrates, so that if he is forced into over-activity for long periods of time he tends to develop a thyroid deficiency, which is recognizable if his physician is curious enough.

When a man with poor energy level (represented by a blood sugar of .080) battles his way determinedly through life, he wins more because of his weakness than in spite of it. He is inclined to be grim and a little hither, is usually somewhat depressed and tends to pessimism. If his thyroid mechanism is strong, as it usually is, he burns his food up and stays thin most of his life. Because energy is not overflowing, he is inclined to be practical, dogmatic, even narrow-minded, proceeding coldly along a carefully marked route. His plans are good and he sticks to them. In emergencies he calls on the medulla of the adrenal glands to trigger the liver-stored sugar he needs into the blood. He sometimes practices controlled anger as a means of fulfilling his plans against opposition. Occasionally, but not often, he is cruel as well as crafty. In all history there is probably no better example of the type than Andrew Jackson. All the elements except cruelty are there. Because he was grim and stern and tough, he was commanding and persistent and constructive. His fires burned brightly and compactly, like the flame of the welder's torch with almost too much air in the mixture. General Douglas MacArthur, though a much more fine-cut stone, belongs to this category.

Between the two "normal" extremes of pancreatic function, there is room for most of the personality types of all men. But the most effective men in the world are those who are not too practical to dream occasionally, and not too visionary to pursue their dream consistently. (Dream is used in the sense of many plans, somehow coordinated into a purposeful whole.) Those men whose blood-sugar remains around .100% embrace most of the men who are the real hope of the world. Those in this class who have strong (not over-balanced) thyroids, balanced pituitaries, and healthy adrenal glands are the makers and doers of the world. They are the Robert Fultons, the Thomas A. Edisons, the Henry Fords, the Harry Houdinis, the Henry J. Kaisers. They travel the middle road, not missing much on either side. Their life-forces flow broad and deep and smooth.

MONUMENTS TO LIMITLESS YESTERDAYS

By JOHN McCABE MOORE

NEAR the northern border of Paraguay is a prominent ridge of geological formation which scientists compute to be older than the accepted history of the race (that is, accepted in the academic sense).

Not long ago a portion of the stony sides of the ridge sloughed away exposing a highly polished granite formation. The most electrifying circumstance was that the granite was cunningly carved with an altogether strange sort of hieroglyph. Over three-thousand feet in length, 40 feet thick and all of highly polished and cleverly sculptured granite.

This reminds one of the noted Egyptologist who was called in to study the tile flooring uncovered in a cellar dug on the west slope of the Rockies. Although the Egyptologist himself had to admit that the flooring was at least twenty-five thousand years old, in order to be in agreement with the important findings of geology above the level of the tile, he has never gone on record as subscribing to the idea that man is older than he thought. Yet the other instances of archeological investigation of various cultures by strata of debris built up by man and by nature in natural caverns in the area west of the Rockies also indicate that man is older than the diehard theorists will admit he is.

It is absolutely impossible that the granite block formation in Paraguay is natural. It is a message stirring the dim memories of the race. Whether part of a former wall-of-China sort of defense system, whether a fragment of an unbelievably colossal building, for the most part now scattered and broken, whether a monument to a great event or a great person, whether a deliberate message inscribed to the later sons of Earth by man's own progenitors, there is still no denying the colossal significance of the monolith.

It is too fragmentary to be able to reason that it was a part of a mammoth defense system. It is too incompletely unearthed to determine whether it may be the definite part of a building either of subterranean or surface construction. As to its further possible portent, particularly its "message" potentialities, only the inscriptions themselves could answer that.

In Egypt the actual age of the Great Pyramid is an open question. It has been the custom to trust legend almost more than science in regard to the date of its foundation. The most liberal of Egyptologists estimate that it may be twenty-five thousand years old. But if the story that it is oriented with Polaris for true north, then it may have been constructed 90,000 years or so ago. That is going some, and is almost too big a bite for anyone to take, but who are we, with our three-score-and-ten, to say it is impossible.

In AngkorVat, the monumental stone city in Indo-China that bears the appearance of having

been forsaken but a short time ago, there is an astronomical chart showing a trajectory between Earth and Venus which indicates a space journey taken about 90,000 years ago between the two bodies. That is indeed something to shake the head over, yet the evidence is carved in stone.

In India, as well as in Egypt, there are stone charts of astronomical portent that indicate that man may easily be a hundred millenia old. Upon these two paragraphs the author does not quote source except privately, and does not go into the questions involved because his knowledge is so meagre in these regards. To those with bona fide purposes, however, information as to source will be given.

To any who have heard of the books called the palmyra, it should be interesting to know that the leaves of those books are said to record that man, essentially as we know him now, is some eighteen millions of years old. Men are inclined to discredit the vastness of their own heritage, however, and there is a strong tendency for the race to class itself as a higher form of anthropoid rather than as a product of the devolution of a greater type of man.

None of these things are urged upon anyone as beliefs or as demonstrable knowledge of the writer. They are merely the curios that occasionally raise their heads and demand a little inspection.

By just supposing that man does have such an age as some sources ascribe to him, is it not more hygienic for humanity to consider itself a cosmic engineer whose seeds have been scattered across the illimitable universe, than for it to limit itself to the incredible short period of development claimed by pedantic archeology? According to a mythology available to all who read these words, the developmental period passed in the evolution of the solar system alone took many billions of years, and a few millions of years spent in the evolution of a group of creatures far surpassing the solar system in their intricacy of construction does not seem an excessive estimate. Biology would have a very difficult problem if it undertook to estimate the time needed for a creature like the anthropoid ape to become as intelligent as man. It is questionable whether the Neanderthal man could ever have become as intelligent as homo sapiens. It is also open to question as to whether the two are definitely related. Perhaps the now-dead Neanderthal being was little advanced beyond the gorilla in intelligence. This sub-human may very well have been a line of gorillas attempting to emerge from the influences of the jungle. If homo sapiens destroyed him, it may have been because of the complete disparity between the two evolutionary trends, one being older, possibly, than the total ancestry of the other. In spite of his great numbers and his widespread activities and

his own knowledge of himself, homo sapiens never yet has proved that he is indubitably the product of an evolutionary process upon the Earth itself. Yet a creature much more limited in numbers and global distribution, the horse, has a clearly marked evolutionary development, without any assumptions or guess-work concerned.

We are not ancestor-worshippers, but if we have any right to pride in the achievements of the individual or of the race, it should be our aim to justify the immensities of creation, the inexplicable monuments of time, and the potentialities of man as he has existed and as he will exist.

THE END

HEALTH ENEMY NUMBER ONE

By ROBERT T. CLAYTON

OF ALL the diseases which bring about high death rates in America, heart disease is the emperor. It outranks cancer and all the others. It has been theorized that the chief reason for this is that the American public suffers more from hypertensive living than any other people. There can be small doubt that this is one of the reasons, but it cannot be assigned to cover the whole cause. Some recent investigations indicate that subnutritional processes are far more likely to be responsible.

About four dollars per death is expended annually attempting to find out the reasons for cancer. Poliomyelitis, a much more minor disease, moves us to expend five dollars per death against it. Tuberculosis, of greater import than is ordinarily conceded, has two dollars per death lavished upon the purpose of finding its solution. But in the case of heart disease, less than twenty cents per death is employed in research of combative measures.

In stark contrast to the monies employed against the natural causes of death, stands the cost per death of the average American soldier of World War I. Ten thousand dollars was the total cost of killing and burying him. And depending upon the branch of service in which he was killed, the American soldier death of World War II vibrated back and forth between fifteen-thousand and fifty-thousand dollars per man. That shameful contrast makes it quite evident that man is more interested in exterminating his kind than in bringing his environment to book.

Quite recently research with vitamin E, the important substance found in the wheat germ, has demonstrated that proper heart condition may sometimes be restored by massive dosages with the compound. It is only fair to remark that if the condition of the heart is grounded in deficiencies of trace minerals, the dosage would have to be repeated again and again. For example, a deficiency of iodine is one of the most common conditions causing heart disease, and it is a deficiency which often defies the clinician to pin down, because it manifests through a number of mechanisms.

The use of the proprietary remedy, coramine, is exactly parallel to the recent work with the vitamin E therapy, depending as it does upon the mass action of an organic substance with

specific enzymatic actions which class it as a "vitamin." Thyroxin, the iodine-bearing compound produced in the thyroid, has an alcohol group in its structure, the same as has vitamin E. In the case of vitamin E, very massive dosage is necessary to bring about heart function improvement. But in order for thyroxin to manifest its action, even quantities barely visible to the eye may be used. The key substances manufactured within the normal human body have thousands of times the activity of most common substances found in food. In the case of thyroxin, a normal molecule contains four iodine atoms. However, when there is marked deficiency of iodine in the body, the thyroid gland substitutes chlorine or bromine for iodine. These sister elements of iodine do not have the same spectra as iodine, and cannot furnish the hot blue spark necessary to tissue oxidation processes. In extreme deficiency there may be no iodine at all in some of the molecules of thyroxin. Such a heterogeneous material as results from the mixing of the halogens in the compound is so foreign to body chemistry that sometimes the thyroid greatly overdevelops in the attempt to satisfy body needs with the poor substitutes. Undoubtedly the superior heart nourishment and condition sometimes resulting from massive dosage with one or another of the vitamins stems largely from the improved fuel and oxygen injection which takes place in the presence of the alcohol group, whether of thyroxin, vitamin E, or nicotinic acid (coramine). Although the alkyl group is not adequately supplied nor adequately stabilized for body use as found in ordinary grain alcohol, it has long been known that there is a brief period of dilation of coronary vessels and general improvement of function in the heart as the result of dosage with ordinary alcohol. The question again comes up as to whether alcoholism is not the expression of another hidden hunger. Whether this hunger is for a mineral such as iodine, or for necessary vitamin substance, is beside the point. Indications are very strong that the organism is seeking something not otherwise sufficiently available to it.

All this reflects back to the sub-disease condition of the majority of American citizens. It is not as much a need for medicine or medical attention, although it is doubtful that there will ever be enough of these, as it is a matter of a crying

need for adequate nutrition. In the United States it has been estimated that there are no less than 78% of the people, who, while not *apparently* starved, are victims of various degrees of sub-nutrition. The greater starving diseases, classed under malnutrition, scourge many of the other peoples of the globe.

NO MEDICAL estimates have ever been offered on the percentage of child abnormalities of the central nervous system (neuroses, etc.), which may be due to the subnutritional processes and which may be responsible in later life for insanity, cancer, heart disease and other sicknesses of major importance. As long as child nutrition is grievously neglected, it may well be expected that hatred, crime, war and all the other diseases will flourish, for the child is father of the man, and sociological disease begins with physical and mental disease.

Heart disease is with us to stay so long as the layman accentuates the emergency measures of medicine to the neglect of common sense and hygiene. There are so many factors in modern America productive of enzymatic imbalance—factors other than the gross lack of certain dietary essentials—that this disease will flourish for many decades. There is the hereditary heart disease, which although it may often be grounded in ancestral deficiency, may also be due to congenital disease. There is the instability of habits in regard to sleep and other common-sense dictates. There is the imponderable effect of continuous excitement, the unbounded and weakening adrenal drive. There is the unevaluated importance of emotional depression and defeatism, of erroneous self-evaluations. In one sense or another, virtually all the diseases of man are of his own asking or his ancestors'.

The place of education in any worth while drive against heart disease is a most important one. Not so much an education encouraging heart sufferers to coddle themselves, as an education for the whole populace in the importance of nutrition for the prevention of trouble with the organ. Geriatrics, the "new" science of war upon sub-nutritional processes which result in rapid aging, and all the other degenerative diseases, is not so much a medical concern as it is a concern of the layman. Physicians are too busy for the discouraging work of attempting to regulate their patients' deeply-ingrained habits of diet, sleep and so forth.

The place of research into heart disease is exceedingly questionable. Very few honest heart patients, except those incapable of sustained thought, fail to assign quite logical and meaningful reasons to their condition. The causes of ordinary heart diseases are quite well-known. Some

causes may be readily removed while some may not, particularly those which have involved considerable damage to heart muscles and nerves. The feasibility of transplanting the animal heart will not make the process any popular one in American medical circles for a long time, regardless of the type of obstacles to such procedure which obviously arise immediately. Heart research will continue to be a matter largely of academic interest that will do little good for most sufferers. A parallel example of sub-nutritional processes of a somewhat different sort is furnished by the surveys of California and Oregon pre-school children in regard to vitamin D deficiency. While in 1937 practically the same percentage (about 90%) of American children suffered from this deficiency as were found to be affected by it in 1946 (the New England survey), the attention of the layman has not been directed to the facts. It might even be considered none of his business in some quarters. Thus the importance of acquainting the average person with the results of research would accomplish infinitely more than the research itself, which is oft-repeated and seldom discloses altogether new facts. No investigators have ever taken up the problem of whether there is a more important sub-nutritional process going on affecting the heredity of man, which produces the so-called avitaminosis D, namely the gradual impairment of the parathyroid bodies, the glands which produce a less toxic (although less effective) calcium vehicle than vitamin D.

The place of a general warfare against heart disease, with the cooperation of lay and medical minds and resources, as well as bringing about the disappearance of a certain amount of foolish and useless professional envy, could undoubtedly greatly reduce the incidence of death from heart disease. The patients' early recognition of heart symptoms would undoubtedly enable medicine to halt the disease processes involved in many cases. The educational of the general public in regard to dietary knowledge, cooking etc. would materially reduce the incidence. The coordination of truly valuable research by the national government, the release of moving pictures and radio skits and press dispatches covering important facts upon the avoiding of heart trouble, and the presentation of the public with the drama of heart transplantation and similar very interesting surgical processes would not decrease the physician's business, but *increase* it.

The large question is not so much whether heart disease can be removed from the position of public enemy number one, but rather how soon America will *permit* its removal.

THE END

SHAVER FANS!

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WHAT MAN

ANSWER TO HUNGER

THE United States Soil Conservation Service classified many, many square miles of land in this our country as being unsatisfactory for further agricultural use until very recently. After ten years of proof from the patient dirt-farmers south of the Mason-Dixon line, however, the Service has been compelled to admit that it has not been accurate in that classification, for kudzu has come bearing marvelous gifts to the soil and to man.

This is a leguminous plant (fixes atmospheric nitrogen) from Japan. It covers the land with lush vegetation, on good soil and poor, stops erosion, feeds cattle and hens, and men. The plant grows below the Potomac river, but it is not sufficiently hardy for the north.

In one year's time the plants can manure a land-space as well as dense tree growth does. It can be used to insure a heavy corn crop. It is plowed under in the spring, the corn is planted and cultivated, and after the corn is "laid by" (last cultivation) the kudzu comes up to keep the ground cool, retain the moisture in the soil and enrich the ground for the ensuing year.

A few years ago, America burned wheat, let acre upon acre of land lie idle, limited hog-raising and cattle-breeding, while there were yet hungry Americans. Whether or not the America of 1946 has reached the "world-consciousness" that might be hoped for, in the America of 1936 there was little heed to the plight of the starving Asiatics and the under-fed Europeans.

Today, it appears, the garbage cans of America have become the flesh-pots for the rest of the world . . . and in the face of the fact that the American nation as a whole is estimated to be 78% under-fed.

Today, famine is marching over India and, as always, China. It is affecting Africa and Europe. It is not the famine of war alone, but the famine of war reinforced and ten-fold multiplied by the famine of Providence.

Because the international world is not yet here, America must look to her own abilities and resources for the answer to a state of affairs for which she is partly, if not largely, responsible, and for which, responsible or not, she must help to find a solution, since the people of the rest of the world look with a jealous eye toward the country which has best exploited certain of its resources. These other peoples do not look upon America with fondness, because they see the willingness of what to them is only American imperialism to despoil them of whatever they may possess. But

CAN IMAGINE....

If you will imagine it, perhaps someone will be inspired to do it. This department is for your ideas, no matter how "wild" they may seem; who knows, they may be the spur to some man's thinking and thereby change our destiny! Tell us your thoughts.

more fundamental than all other considerations is the appetite of the individual, and his dire need for food.

The Kudzu Club of America, a private organization of the men who showed what the plant could do for the gutted acreage south of the Mason-Dixon line, is having to do what it can without any appreciable subsidization, in its fight for the improvement of animal and human nutrition. At the rate they are able to proceed, they will be lucky if they are able to show eight-million acres of kudzu in the entire Southland by 1950.

During the 1930's our government underwrote the reduction of food-supplies. During the same decade it underwrote widespread attempts to halt erosive processes in certain states. Today, with the most of anti-erosion measures used then already washed away, and with but little accomplished for the money spent even at the time, no Congressman gets up to suggest that the Kudzu Club be mightily underwritten.

Why should the Kudzu Club be underwritten? Because hens pastured on kudzu produce superior eggs at a cost of three cents per dozen. Because with proper endocrine manipulations the cost of raising superior beef should be about the same per pound as that of eggs, possibly less. Hog litters can be greatly increased in their numbers and rate of growth, by beneficial endocrine treatment, so that with good food, such as kudzu (instead of poisonous slops and barnyard litter) pork that is far superior can be raised in half the time, and in greater amount.

When the people, through the government, do not underwrite such important enterprises as the spread of kudzu, and the investigation of new strains of it to push the kudzu belt northward, they are failing themselves first of all and most of all, but they are also failing to take advantage



of a magnificent tool for the improvement of international relations. Properly applied, kudzu and animal culture could remake the food supply, not only of America, but of the world.

INSTEAD of stopping with the singular fact that kudzu can increase the larder of the world in tremendous amount by itself, certain biological facts that have been demonstrated should be mentioned in conjunction with kudzu culture.

Animals injected in sequential generations with thymus extract develop much more rapidly and satisfactorily, beginning with those born of the first generation treated. The rate of growth and differentiation is three to ten times more rapid than that of untreated animals of the same stock. In addition to this, there are absolutely no untoward results to the animals, either genetically or in regard to health. In fact health is remarkably improved, even at birth. The litters consist of more animals, and the mortality rate is considerably lowered, indicating greater health of ovarian tissue; uterine tissue, and the total tissue of the new-born animals.

The thymus gland nourishes and activates the connective tissues, which in turn feed the solid tissues of the entire body. It is thus quite reasonable that the thymus injections should improve the health of the animal body. It devolves also from this that in a sufficient number of generations the general health improvement should re-

sult in superior stock. Thus the genetic significance becomes definitely positive.

The thymus gland is articulate with the thyroid and parathyroid glands, two other bodies of great physical importance, and through its effect upon these glands it has additional meaning for health through the endocrine system.

The hundred-thousand and more medical technicians already discharged from the armed forces, many of them disheartened and disgusted by the economic and pedantic restrictions staying them from the civilian pursuit of an interesting and humane wartime occupation, would be the last to object to becoming part of a mammoth endeavor to increase the livestock and meat production of the world. These men, integrated with the Kudzu Club, and directed by its members, could quite literally double, or even triple, the flesh supply available to the United States. It would be a matter of a year or so before the vast results would begin to appear, but they would be evident in time to save many millions of men from starvation, during the rest of the 1946-1953 famine, for meat, next to fats, is the most concentrated energy food obtainable, and the most fundamental.

Suppose the farmers on 150,000,000 acres of Southern farmlands (particularly where cotton, tobacco and erosion have ruined the soil) addressed themselves to the task of putting it all into kudzu, solely for pasturage purposes. Three-quarters-of-a-billion steers could be pastured upon such an acreage. It would be sufficient pasture for at least one-billion-five-hundred-million head

of hogs.

Upon a similar amount of land, where the crop could be easily harvested, more than enough ensilage to maintain the livestock through the winter could be grown with the aid of kudzu. Upon a third acreage of the same extent, with kudzu simultaneously improving the soil and increasing the yield, about 15 billion bushels of corn could be raised. This could be employed in the final fattening of the livestock for market, which, in the case of thymus-treated cattle (without even employing the pituitary growth factor isolated in 1944) should begin about a year-and-a-half from birth, while fattening of the treated hogs could begin for light-weight pigs in four months, and for heavier pigs at six months. The thymus treatment thus cuts off from two to six months of the maturation time of livestock.

The fact that such a tremendous program would require the arable land of somewhat more than three states the size of Texas, should certainly not deter the nation from utilizing the ruined acreage of the south, and even if it became a cooperative enterprise involving certain areas of Mexico, that could do the international spirit no harm.

This is creative ideation revolving about two thematic ideas, neither one of which America has yet touched. If the entire food supply of the nation were planted and harvested as though it constituted a literal war emergency measure (which it does in the fullest sense of the word), and if advantage were taken of knowledge beside that involved in this message, how long could world famine last?—*John McCabe Moore*

THE RADIATIONS OF SOL

By JOSEPH M. McINTYRE

IT WAS well over a hundred years ago that scientists made the first serious guess as to how the radiant energy of the sun arises. The original theory was that the hydrodynamics affected by gravitation furnished the energy directly. It was realized later that such a theory was untenable because of the paltry radiations that would be yielded from this source. The idea was therefore abandoned entirely when the researches of Eddington had showed that an amount of energy such as the sun emits can only be accounted for by such phenomena as the transmutation from atom to atom. The day-to-day vibrations which the local star emits are thus satisfactorily assigned to the same underlying causes as are operative in the case of the atomic bomb. However, it is only common sense to revert to the gravitational forces for the original lighting of the atomic fires of the sun and stars. In the accompanying simple discussions of the laws of transmutations of energy, it is easy to understand how the hot bodies of the

universe must have arisen. This method of explaining star origin is not to be found in the literature, insofar as is available to the writer. Any correction on this point will be appreciated.

Sir James Jeans was probably the leading proponent of the hypothesis that the cosmic forces are running down. Many thinkers find the idea that the universe as we know it may be losing its energies. However, a little reflection makes this hypothesis a rather muddled one. If the universe is defined as a localized and limited mechanism existing within a greater entity, then there is always a reality beyond to which energies lost from this universe are plying. If, on the other hand, the universe is viewed as an entity comprising totality, so that there are no confines of space to which reality is unknown, it is quite apparently impossible to conceive of the running-down of the universe finally and completely. It is probable that the gloominess of the total death theory of the matter-energy relationship is only

the evidence of the anthropomorphic tendencies which all men have. In other words, simply because it is believed that individuals must begin and end quite completely, at least as physical beings, the tendency is to liken the universe to the individual. What is probably the most ancient human thought (expressed in the Senzar language which antedates Sanskrit) favors the idea that the universe goes through a day-and-night cycle, but it does not suggest that either the day or the night is unending. In the view of present-day knowledge of physics, especially in regard to the daily more indisputable cyclic nature of all things, it would be illogical to assume that final imbalance occurs with a strictly non-sentient scheme resulting. The same arguments apply quite as well to universe-death by contraction (heat-death) as to the entropy belief. (A well-annotated copy of the Bhagavad Gita discusses the day-and-night theory, giving not only the length of the cosmic day but the year length and the century length as well. However, the day-and-night idea is not applied to totality but to zones or locales. At no time is the complete absence of sentience in totality implied.)

More in keeping with the measured tread of present-day wise men are the theories of the possible length of life of the sun. It will require many millions of years for the present mass of the sun to disappear by radiation, and before such a circumstance could take place, the reduced size with the lower gravitational stress would become such as to make further transmutation impossible, thus putting out the atomic fires until such time as the cool mass remaining were built up again to a point where the fires would be relit by gravitational stress. This continuous process is outlined in section II under the Laws of the Transmutation of Energy.

*The Laws of the Transmutation of Energy
(An interpretation of energy-matter relationships,
and the abstraction of their meanings)*

WHEN man first learned to produce thermal energy by means of crude mechanics, a tremendously important step toward conquering the environment which rules him was made. It is logical that the mythical discovery of fire as a servant should be the spring-board to any discussion of man's relation to the energies which with matter complete environment.

Man first learned that fire was to be feared, unless controlled. When he had learned to control it he found that it could be used to make himself more comfortable, and to reduce the difficulties of flesh-eating. Little by little he learned that the physical state of ordinary water could be changed to the gaseous state, and that some solid materials could be made liquid by its force. Thus the age of cooking and of working in metals gradually resulted in the comedy of civilization. All the orthodox story of remembered culture in this regard brings us up to the present day, or very nearly so.

Man's first scientifically recorded realization that

thermal energy may be converted into light and other vaster forms of energy came in the nineteenth century. The work of men like Bunsen resulted in the theory of radiation by incandescent bodies. The introduction of sufficient heat into any solid body of matter will not only cause change in the physical state of matter, going from solid to liquid to gas in form, but it will induce changes in the forms of heat energy, transmuting it into light. Before the melting point is reached, many substances produce a continuous visible spectrum with all the colors represented. The theory of incandescents points out the fact that concentration of thermal energy may be so heightened in a solid body (under correct conditions) as to bring about a spectrum continuous from the visible range to the cosmic ray. Needless to say, man has produced such conditions only with the aid of circumstances which he is not yet able to control. Now, realizing that heat or thermal energy is only one of many ranges of radiation constituting the ladder from the simplest manifesting energy form to the simplest component of matter, we may abstract the primary law of form-transmutation.

I

THE law of the simultaneous concentration of matter and energy states that the greater the energy influx to a solid body, the greater the maximum emitted frequency becomes. Also, the greater the energy content of influx to a solid body the larger the quantity of radiation that ensues.

In illustration of this law the intra-thermionics of iron may be employed. When a mass of iron is gradually raised in temperature by means of the principles of diathermy* the color of the cool solid is gradually changed to cherry red. The original color is only color by reflection. Were the human eye able to distinguish the different 'wavelengths' (colors, if you will) in the infra-red regions, the harest application of heat would be seen to cause a color change. When the induction of heat is sufficient to result in the emission of visible wavelengths, the eye apprehends that the top frequency emitted continuously increases as thermal concentration is raised, by the color changes from cherry red to orange red to yellowish red to yellow and so forth to white and blue white. At this point, were one able to maintain the solid state of the iron (this could be done by the application of sufficient pressure) and were the human eye capable of discriminating frequencies in the ultra-violet region, the further heightening of thermal concentration would result successively in the discrimination of greater and greater frequencies ranging from the

*Note: By avoiding the use of heat from other sources, such as fuel-burning, it is possible to observe just the true emitted energies arising in the iron. Thus the heat and light quanta arising from other sources than the solid under consideration do not confuse the observer.

actinic rays through the various X-rays, gamma rays, disintegrator rays and cosmic rays. Further increase of concentration of the thermal energy would have to be expressed by the glowing iron mass as electrons, and far beyond that, as protons (protons are masses of highly compressed electrons). It is thus seen that increase of energy content results in increase of top frequency emitted.

The total amount of radiation from such a body increases with energy concentration so that an observer would have to move farther and farther away in order to avoid 1) being burned, 2) being blinded, 3) being 'sun-struck', 4) being killed by X-rays, gamma etc. or cosmic rays. Beyond the gamma rays high concentrations of radiation would disintegrate the body, possibly without even a puff of smoke.

It should now be apparent that what has been viewed is the phenomenon taking place within the stars. There were lines discerned in the spectra of certain great stars during 1938 and 1939 indicating that mammoth atoms, far more complex than that of uranium are built up by the functioning of this law.

Now, remembering that the only example employed in illustration was that of *heat* energies, extend the application of the law into all the infra-red regions. The penetrative property of X-rays, cosmic rays and other radiant energies in the ultra-violet is obviously a property that increases directly with the mass or frequency of the radiation. To the other side of visible light, however, this penetrative property tends to increase directly with the reduction of mass or frequency of the energy in question. On account of the *extreme* power of penetration of the quanta of gravity, no way is known to 'insulate' against gravity in order to prevent it from doing the work of moving bodies together. No matter how dense the ceiling above one, he is still pushed toward the center of gravity of the earth. This variety of energy from among the infra-red types is everywhere present, and brings about the relative conceptions known as mass and density (weight and degree of concentration of weight). This universal source of energy is the main-spring of the transmuting bodies called stars. The law of the concentration of mass is hence in order.

II

THE law of the concentration of mass states that the increasing amalgamation of matter (as by the planetesimal theory) results in increasing transmutation of simple energy forms.

Envision, if you will, the gradual growth of bits of cosmic debris (aggregates from the size of the atom to the size of the earth) into a vast body the size of the sun. At first look, this body would

be thought of as being a cold body. However, when aggregate has attained appreciable size, its outer layers, purely by their great 'mass,' exert tremendous pressure upon its core. The greater the total mass, then, the greater the hydro-dynamics concentration brought to bear upon the center (the hydro-dynamics quanta are the transmuted gravitational energies). After the hydro-dynamic strain develops sufficient pressure upon the core, heat is produced (see number I) causing a proximal* liquid relationship among the molecules of the core. As mass continues to increase, so does energy transmutation. Thus the core becomes a widening incandescent solid. Its energies are largely insulated from free radiation into space.

When the energy of the core of the hypothetical body has reached the necessary concentration, atomic disruption and reformation begins, the tendency being toward the formation of atoms of greater mass. In answer to the tremendous pressure the unit particles of matter tend to greater concentration. When the atomic fires have been lighted, a slow resolution of the entire body into the 'molten state' begins. Thus after a few billions of years a new star is created. Thus energy transmutation is a function of concentration of matter, the luminant life of a star is seen to be far longer than was heretofore admitted, and the sun will probably outlast man as we know him by at least a couple of decades.

III

FROM the law of simultaneous concentration of matter and energy, and from the law of concentration of matter which is corollary thereto, it may be deduced that energy forms condense (i.e., are transmuted into higher frequencies) only by compression, or rather by two or more quanta being forced into nearly identical positions, so that they are literally welded together. And in order to conceive of the universe as being compatible with true order, the transmutation of greater energy patterns into lesser patterns must be admitted and assigned the same sort of logics as the amalgamation processes.

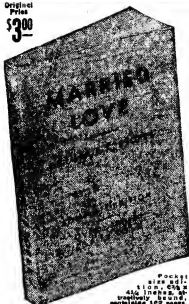
The law of diffuse energies states that the impingement of low concentrations of energy upon the field of a body matter whose ratio of energy influx to energy outflow is substantially unity (with the absolute temperature lower than that necessary to the formation of the diffuse energies striking it) results in the formation of lower frequency energies.

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DISCUSSIONS DEPARTMENT, ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
185 North Wabash Avenue, Chicago 1, Illinois

REPORT FROM ALASKA

Sirs:

I have just finished reading the September issue of *Harper's Magazine*, and I noted where William S. Baring-Gould had selected my letter to you last winter as an example of crackpot letters. I bitterly resent this. It is all well and good to sit in a comfortable office or home and look upon far places and strange things as through a veil of unbelief . . . however, when you are there and death looks you right in the eye . . . you feel a little different and the safe, comfortable U. S. A. becomes the world of never-was and "does it really exist?". I felt that you too, Mr. Palmer, had more or less given me up for a jerk who was only trying to pull your leg. Again the fear that maybe all this was only a promotion stunt and gales of laughter in the AS office.

Well, you see how it is. Dick and I have made our Alaska journey and we failed, we lost and we lost a lot, Dick lost his life. The details I don't suppose you are interested in, however Shaver would get a kick out of a journey to the Alaska cave. It seems strange to read AS and see the "little" people still wondering and still "investigating" their claims of caves. Go and take a look for yourself, I say. Sure, it takes money and guts. I know, I have spent all I have of both. It sickens me when I read an article like Gould's. So smug and sure. After all, Dick is dead, and that meant a lot to me. I don't care much whether you believe or not, I'm sick of the whole mess. I don't even want to think of last year, and of Alaska least of all. Just wanted to go on record as being further sickened by Gould's article.

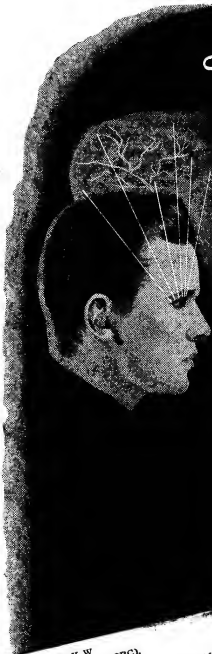
Fred L. Crisman
125 Woodland
Salishan Add.
Tacoma, Washington

Well, there you are, Mr. Crisman, on record. And we heartily agree with you. But we are interested in the details of your little journey, and we offer herewith to publish your story of that Alaska cave complete. Our readers want proof. We want proof. If you've got any at all, we

want it. In your previous letter, you asked us to keep your identity secret. We had to do that, and you can't blame us for being reluctant to believe, although we did publish your letter because it was right in line with what we do believe, and that is the Shaver Mystery. It is shocking, certainly, to have you tell us that your companion was killed in that Alaskan adventure, but we can't let it just rest there. Either this is true, or it isn't true. And if true, you can't just let it go by being sickened of the whole affair. We have chosen to publish this letter, rather than replying directly to you as yet, although by the time this is published you will have heard from us. If your story can be proved, and this cave shown to us, we CAN and WILL raise money for a complete investigation. Our readers, judging from the thousands of letters we have, would find a way to finance the thing themselves, if we didn't. They're that interested. For example, Chet Geier, well known author, has recently started a club of AMAZING STORIES readers who are interested in doing something about solving the mystery. That ought to prove to you that you would certainly not be considered a crackpot if you came forward with your complete story. Baring-Gould, true enough, took it upon himself to cover a subject whereon he was completely ignorant, and worse still, grossly misinformed. He was like a Zulu given the job of writing a technical article about an atomic pile from information given him by a Hottentot. We consider Mr. Gould's article to be simply a smart article-writer's annexing of a fat check by getting there fustest with the mostest words on a subject he was clever enough to realize was "hot." He writes for a living, and he'd do an article about steel mills, if it was as hot. Although we hope he'd go to a steel man for his information, and not a Hottentot.

So, let us go on record too. You send us your story, and prove it, and we'll pay you a damnsite more than Gould got for his article. And if you prove to have no more facts than Gould did, we'll forget about it and no hard feelings. Sound okay to you?—Ed.

(Continued on page 170)



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(Continued from page 168)

THE GREEN GODDESS

Sirs:

When I wrote "Quest of Brail," the green goddess seen by the hero of the story was and is as real to me as it was to him. It is this interweaving of fact in my stories that may give you some idea of what it means to know that these beings do exist, somewhere out in space, and that they do live forever. Today they do not come near the earth, but if they did, I can easily imagine how it would be like—to have the vast science of this green goddess wipe out our evils, and bestow great good upon us, and cure us of the sun poisons that insidiously doom us to a lifetime of dying even as we are born. It has been this vision of a far-off goddess, which is a reality which I have seen many times in the telaug thought records, which has inspired me most. Such things do exist!

Richard S. Shaver,
Barto, Penna.

We reproduce this fragment from an old letter of Mr. Shaver's, to show the inspiration for the painting on this month's front cover. Being in a jam for a cover, we thought of this letter, and of Shaver's vision, and conceived the idea that it might be a good cover scene. But here's where the "odddity" really comes in. Artist James Teason, who had never painted for us before, and who had never heard of Shaver, brought the cover painting in to the art director, who bought it. When we walked in with the letter, you can imagine the effect of the coincidental Teason had almost exactly illustrated the letter—and so, here's the first magazine cover ever to be painted which illustrates a letter.—Ed.

MORE VISIONS AND VOICES

Sirs:

I brood again with my grey matter in terrific turmoil and wonder if I may recall some of my "racial memories" as you would call them. For printing my last letter, my utmost thanks and good wishes for further reports from readers. I for one, will bar no holds and furthermore I challenge anyone to prove that the visions and the voices are not real. I have periodical contacts and am inclined to believe that I am the re-incarnation of myself from former life.

Re-incarnation, I believe, is possible by one of three ways: 1) a mech (machine), 2) self re-incarnation by will power; 3) by spells or the will power of another person.

I stand in rebuke—but could not the Bible be the telling of the earthly visit of the "Elder One" or "Great One"? In my first letter I failed to say much or give a detailed account of my racial memories (recollections) and did not make myself clear in many ways. Here I shall try to give more detail.

Among my earliest racial memories are those of the alien vessel that I was on, and of myself,

my parents, and my own immediate family. Picture a space ship or vessel of great dimensions—over a half mile long and fully four hundred feet at its widest point. A vessel tubular in shape (somewhat cigar-shaped but more streamlined) and with no protruding breaks in its sleek dull greyish hull. Portholes were uncountable—and the intricacy of its endless corridors amazing beyond imagination.

At the earliest recollections I was young (only 90 and still looking no older than 20) and celebrating my advancement to a higher rank—that of co-assistant to the second mate. My parents were at the seemingly incredible age of 130 and looking still in their fifties or sixties. I was married to a very lovely looking lass and was the proud father of four with another on its way. The last alien racial memory was of the crash when the ship reached earth.

The design of the vessel was such that it was not capable of overcoming the gravitational pull of earth and thus the crash being inevitable. Few survived who were in the fore part of the ship and even less of the mass who were in the aft and mid-sections. (See note on family names.) Among those who survived were a few of the mutants of the crew and my father; my oldest brother, Marc; my son, Marn and my daughter, Renel and my two sisters, Mera and Tall. Of those killed in the crash were the great majority of the settlers and the crew; my mother; my wife; my oldest brother, Tabr; two sisters and my oldest boy and girl.

Later racial memories (or second life). These memories are earthly and this makes me more certain that I have lived before and that these are memories of a past life.

Later racial memories take place about the time of the "golden ages of the Roman empire." My parents, a wife and children, and of participation in skirmishes and battles. In my childhood I was ungainly but handsome in a sort of childish way. My father was a captain in the king's army and was rather tall, aquiline featured and had dark, curly hair. My mother was of medium height and the picture of nature at its best. In early manhood I was trained in the use of handling the short sword and long sword and also as a lancer. Then shortly after I became a captain, my father died and my mother gave me his short sword, helmet, cloak and breastplates. These were unlike any worn by the other captains and more jeweled and decidedly alien. The cloak was of a finer weave and the metal of the helmet, sword and breastplates was very shiny and after the many long years of use were still unmarred or scratched. Here was the same crest and helmet, short sword and breastplates as in the alien memories. My mother died shortly after my first visions of myself in battle (my Roman mother). The last of these visions were of my beautiful, buxom wife and three lovely children and another babe on the way.

Pausing briefly, I would like to say that the

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as a cause of these "recollections." It doesn't prove Shaver's "thought records" either, but it does make the most logical explanation of how anyone can "remember" a past he never lived, and yet feel sure he did live it. If the reader will remember, the thought record gives one the impression of actually going through the experience recorded, and going through it with the illusion of being the recording entity himself. Thus, if you were to be connected to a thought record, (via telau as Shaver says he frequently is) you would seem to experience, as in a dream so real it cannot be separated from the real, that which was recorded. If it were of being in battle, you would see your opponents through your own eyes, hear their shouts with your own ears, and feel their sword thrust through your own flesh! Is this really what has happened to Mr. Bullock? Has he been "connected up" with some of the ancient thought records (perhaps even family histories) via a telau ray? We find it too unreasonable to accept reincarnation or racial memory, on purely scientific grounds, as an impossibility, but we can see where a gadget such as the thought record, coupled with another gadget such as the telau, could produce exactly this result, and with no need to go counter to existing and provable scientific facts.—Ed.

STRANGE NEWS IN THE PAPERS

Sirs:

Who says there are no oddities or strange news in the papers? I know of four in sixteen days. 1) three major hotel fires in different parts of the country and so far no real satisfactory explanation, 2) from Chicago a news item about a five-year-old boy—is he a mutant or what? (Editor's note: Allen Richard Carroll, who can quote from the encyclopedia on any desired subject; recited "The Night Before Christmas" at 2½; explain the Electoral College; whose latest interest is the technical details of atomic fission.) 3) Windsor, Ontario, bodies of tornado victims looked like dried out mummies. 4) The rats at Sacramento.

I enjoy Mr. Shaver's stories, enveloped as they are by "is it fiction?" If so, the following are not.


Back in 1909 I lived in the village of Edwinstowe, dubbed "The center of the dukeries." That is self-explanatory. For about a week or ten days during the summer of either '08 or '09, I don't exactly remember which, stones ranging in size from marbles to four and five pounds would come crashing out of the air. Where did they come from? It would occur in daylight or night. Once as we were lined up to go into school, it happened severely. The principal turned pale and hurried all the pupils inside the school.

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to search that area? I could go to it today. And why were the doors and windows fastened tight at night time in such a peaceful community?

I am over fifty now, but I haven't forgotten.

The winter of 1934-35 found my wife, myself and our then baby boy living in Canada. I remember an article in the Toronto Star Weekly about a tahoo area in Northern Canada of unseen giants, of things out of the icy waters up there.

Langley Field is but a short distance from my present home. Planes crash in the water and on land for no apparent reason. I know a lot of officers out there, but they avoid questions with "I don't know," or "no report given as yet," again why?

Telepathy? Yes it was quite evident between my parents; at times too between my wife and I. A sameness of thought by two people trying to say the same thing at the same time, or an utterance in answer to an unspoken thought is an indication of inherent ability to use telepathy.

W. Waterhouse

324 Buxton Ave.

Newport News, Va.

Yes, these "Fortean" things are happening all the time. What is the real explanation for them? Some of them can be rationalized, and most of them are, by people who rationalize everything so that they need no longer think about them. Some, no doubt, are perfectly explainable, by known means, but others are not. It is these others that interest us and our readers so much.—Ed.

NOT ABOUT SHAVER!

Sirs:

Believe it or not, this letter is not about the "Shaver Mystery."

I have been a SF fan for over 15 years, was one of the charter subscribers to "Wonder Stories" and have read **AMAZING STORIES** and others of the SF publications during that period.

However, I'm afraid all our SF mags must take a back seat. I've just perused the July 8th, 1946 issue of "Life" magazine, and the article contained therein on "plutonium laboratory" far surpasses any SF efforts I've seen for sheer "unbelievableness" and "trite" names. In paragraph 3 the article states that if such-and-so were done, "a completely new artificial element, called plutonium" would result! In the fourth paragraph mention is made of separation plants which must be in operation before the first "plutonium" was produced. Then in paragraph five, "invisible amounts of the artificial element neptunium" are found!

No one will fail to accept the aforementioned article as anything short of "gospel" truth. How then can anyone question SF stories? What is so unbelievable about the "Shaver Mystery?" (Oh, oh! It did get into the letter, didn't it?)

Keep up the good work. AMAZING is tops for my money.

Edward F. Williams
Peabody College
Box No. 202
Nashville 4, Tenn.

Amazing what people will swallow when it comes from a source called "authoritative," isn't it, Mr. Williams.—Ed.

DREAMS

Sirs:

I was very much interested in the series of Shaver Mysteries, and after reading the August issue, I have come to the conclusion that Shaver is quite right. When I was fourteen or fifteen years old, I had dreams concerning myself and places. Each morning when I awoke, everything that I had dreamed would happen. Even now, every once in a while I have these dreams.

I have always believed there was a race of people living under the earth. I am an ex-marine and would like very much to help in finding these people.

Robert L. Robbins
909 23rd Ave.
Oakland 1, Calif.

It happens, but how? Ask Shaver.—Ed.


THE AGE OF SPECIALIZATION

By
JOHN McCABE MOORE

MODERN civilization is caught up with the urge to specialize. The individual is urged to acclimate himself to a specific pursuit as though he were fitted primarily for just one type of endeavor. Admittedly, this way of selecting an occupation enables the citizen to become an integral part of a vast mass-production organization than any set of manufactures represents—civilization itself. However, specialization also has a number of disadvantages which in high enthusiasm are disregarded.

As a prime example of what often happens under the theory of specialization, witness chemistry and physics. Chemistry, as a study of certain important aspects of the physical environment, belongs to the general field of physics, which by definition includes virtually all of the searchings of man for fundamental understanding of the environment. The chemist, however, in order to deserve the name of the class of workers to which he claims to belong, must be as much practical and capable of achievement, as he must be funda-

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mental. It is not permissible to establish heterogeneous guesses at cause-and-effect cycles in the field of chemistry, and then to fight for those guesses as though they were final principles, as has often been done in the more abstruse field of physics. On the other hand, the chemist is faced with the necessity of grounding his work in unmistakable principles which are operative over the face of the globe, wherever men need to apply them. Thus chemistry has been much more of a plodding science than has the flashing rapier of the more general field called physics. Until the atomic bomb investigations, these two types of science have been in more or less contempt with each other. Probably the chief reason for this fact is that, whereas chemists are required to have a fair understanding of physics in order to follow their own branch, physicists have never been required to pursue a study of the elements of chemistry. Yet of all the aspects of physical knowledge, chemistry has been the most important to man, embracing such things as cookery, leather-tanning, steel-making, arrow-poisoning, medicine, ceramics (plus plastics), glass manufacture, cereal processing, meat-packing, etc., for a long time.

Thus today the concepts of the physicist and the chemist are usually so far apart that reconciliation is only a ridiculous proposal. Yet the rational cooperation of these two great classes of scientists could bring about miracles beyond the dreams of the atomic venture.

In 1940, Germany possessed per capita three times as many trained technicians as did America. These technicians were of all types. Furthermore, if a man does not practically complete Ph.D. work in Germany, he may as well take up his shovel, for training must be thorough in fundamentals and thorough in the fulfillment of specialized requirements. Part of this national deference derives from the fact that the system of education in Germany is national and integrated. The other part devolves from the youth and exuberance and careless attitude of our own nation. Of all the resources which Germany drew upon in her second tremendous battle for global supremacy, her thoroughly practical technicians represented the greatest. Out of nowhere they produced gasoline, synthetic meat, synthetic fabrics and synthetic leather. Whatever else we opine about the nation, it must be admitted that technical coordination and management of resources certainly found their supreme manifestation in yesterday's Germany.

In our own country, with its great wealth both per capita and per totum, its singular liberties and great advantages in individual choice, there is an inclination to forget the importance of the fundamentals. It is thus possible for specialists to skim over the basic parts of education, taking with them barely enough to permit their continuance of specialized study. America laughs up her sleeve about the student who passes an examination by trickery, guilts at the parent who does his little boy's homework for him, pats the teacher on the

back who knows all about how to teach and nothing of what he is called upon to teach, and laughs long and loudly at the complete disparity between the curricular work followed in different states of the union. No wonder candidates for medical degrees go through such fundamental work as physiological chemistry with the greatest possible haste, and with a burning fever to attack the "important" subjects of diagnosis and treatment. It is not at all amazing that many physicians cannot grasp the complexities of the oxidation-reduction equations of chemistry. It is even less exciting that able chemists seldom appreciate the importance of abstract principles of physics. It is exactly the same sort of an educational process which forces women to arrange family diets without due regard to logical nutrition, of which there is a great wealth of knowledge already accumulated, which should be inculcated in desirable degree, through education.

A CERTAIN woman patient in an asylum was diagnosed by a number of different specialists. Each one, like the blind men who went to "see" the elephant, had his own concept of her condition. It took an old country doctor who was rambling innocently through the wards, looking at charts and patients, to point out that the woman really was suffering from pellagra (acute deficiency of nicotinic acid, a member of the vitamin B series).

In a Tacoma shipyard, during the late war, in the pipefitting department making davits and sundry other items such as deck rails, et al, for destroyers and airplane carriers, the lack of fundamental knowledge of principles on the part of pipefitters in key positions caused the turnover of men in such positions to be abnormally high. A certain very good friend of the author went to work in the department, and by the logical application of simple physical principles, became the producer of seven- to eight-fold the amount of work previously done by any one man. This man received an award for being the best production worker among 27,000 people. Where others had failed to hold his job at this post for longer than two months in any given instance, this individual continued in the work for *four solid years*. The most revealing fact about the situation is that when others in the same department attempted to emulate this man, they were accused of trying to be a second George Blank. The main difference between the person in point and those beside the point was a little education and its logical employment. Those of us who had the experience of participating in industry during the war, know that for the most part there was inefficiency, poor supervision, inadequate coordination, coupled with boundless expense sheets and unlimited resources. And today, industry has sunk back into a miasma of individual and total selfishness which eclipses the inefficiency of the "total" war effort. The men who laugh at the lucid understanding of the



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non-specialist (such as Mr. Blank above) are the supposed specialists of our modern age.

Education in America needs coordination, higher requirements, broader background. All the resources which can be brought to bear on the problems of teaching would not be too much to employ in the satisfying of that need. Methods of teaching cannot confer the ability to get an idea across upon a moron.

In the matter of the moving picture as a neglected force in education, the fact is well-known that 83% of all one learns enters the mind through the eyes, and only an approximate 17% through the ears. In the audio-moving picture, both methods of education can be so skillfully combined that vast accomplishments may be realized in the field of education from the kindergarten to the Ph. D. degree. Every act of skill of consequence can be much more easily inculcated than it is at present. The application of such methods experimentally during the recent war showed that troops could be trained in a superior manner, and in jig time, for any type of military or civil endeavor. This means that every person not cheated of important senses or mentality by heredity or accident, could receive a thorough and interesting education at once broad in its scope, yet submitting the best sort of foundation for truly necessary specialization.

Our America has never yet met a test worthy of its mettle. The time may not be far off when it will meet such a test. If the United States is the greatest, richest, most capable, gifted and charitable nation in the world, it behooves it also to be the most highly cultured and educated country on the globe, since it is more and more apparent that mere blood and sweat and tears will not dissolve the problems of internationalism any longer, even temporarily.

The call for educational reform, and for the utilization of the educational science which has evolved hit by hit since the medieval times, must not be made to the people alone, but to the business-as-usual leadership of the people, for responsible educational systems have always been a strictly national affair wherever there has been a high degree of national coordination.

The men of today owe it to progeny, as well as to themselves, to see that the chains are struck off from truly liberal education. The educational sound-film, the educational radio, the educational press should be resurrected from a tawdry sensationalism which defeats the very purposes of education. The great biographies, the stirring fight of man against disease, against ignorance and superstition, against the perils of the sea, against the problems of aeronautics, against the manifold hungers of the body and the mind, are the deep-laid drama of the individual himself. Yet he is almost never encouraged to learn the facts and know the truth. This drama needs showing in far more realistic manner than ever before. How about it?

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Dr. Frank B. Robinson

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